

THE KING'S SECRET.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "THE LOST HEIR."

"Give it an understanding, but no tongue."

SHAKESPEARE.

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CHAPTER I.

It was about an hour before noon, on the following day, that, at the herald's trumpet, were assembled the high nobles of England, with their courtly dames and blooming daughters seemingly attended by all the gallant knights and promising young esquires and gentlemen in waiting here upon the two courts ; for the Prince of Wales had his own household, great officers, and all other appurtenances befitting his high estate, in a sort

and fashion hardly second to his royal father ; who, on his part, loved and encouraged this right worthy and prince-like magnificence of his open-handed son.

Nearly at the same time the monarch, wholly unarmed, bare headed, and wearing the penitential gown of the monks of St. John, stepped from his floating palace, to the end of fulfilling his vowed pilgrimage, and giving thanks for his deliverance from the traitorous men and furious elements that together had assailed him.

Mounting a lowly and meek-looking palfrey, which stood here prepared for him, having neither saddle nor sautoir, nor other trapping, save a woolly sheep-hide buckled over its back by a linen surcingle, the King patiently awaited his turn in the procession, as ordered by the Lord Abbot of St. Anne's ; and, as he looked round him here, had his heart been less filled with holy and pious thoughts, he might have been moved to smile at the contrast his own appearance made, thus strangely clothed and

horsed, to the glittering and nobly mounted band which, on every side encompassed him about. Beckoning Audeley, Sir Johan de Maltravers, and our hero to approach him, as they paused here, he addressed them in a tone loud enough to be heard by all of the court present.

“Come, fellow voyagers, to whose loyalty, be it known to all here, we are, under the saints, indebted for our present safety—bide ye close by me, and let us, mates in peril, together approach the holy shrine of the blessed saint in whose favour we found rescue and safety.’

The cavalcade was at length set in motion, and never, in the long course of time which has intervened between the present and that day, has the dull flat lying between Sluys and Ardembourg been so gaily peopled ; bands of mounted archers, bearing their long-bows in their hands, followed by a squadron of men-at-arms, fully accoutred as if for battle, led the way, and kept the narrow road, along which slowly marched various holy groups, com-

prising the brethren of the different orders in Sluys, or its immediate neighbourhood, displaying all the splendour of their houses ; next to these rode the wealthy deputies of the free towns ; ostentatious of display these proud plebeians moved here surrounded by numerous gaily appointed servitors, and accompanied by their sumptuously apparelled wives, who far outshone the high-born English dames that came marshalled after, having each a cavalier in watchful attendance, on either side of the silken bridle rein. Lastly ambled on the King, immediately preceded by the superiors of the different orders, and followed on foot by the Prince and a few of his household, whilst, led by grooms, their horses, royally caparisoned, wantoned idly along, as if impatient to be backed.

Though the line of march extended for full three miles, yet so well kept was the narrow road, that the rearward mass of the attendant throng was still struggling through the wide western gate of Sluys, when the incense-bear-

ers of the Abbot of St. Anne, who led the van, were *flinging their hallowed perfumes* around the shrine of our Ladye of Ardembourg, close to which the monarch of England was this day seen to lie for many minutes prostrated in deep prayer before the eyes of his people. Gradual silence at sight of this soon succeeded the loud hum of a first entrance, and devotion being the fashion of the court, the semblance at least was put on by all.

The mass concluded, the King, conducted by the high church dignitaries, disappeared to change his dress, as well as to break his fast on the meal prepared for him by the superior of the monastery of our Ladye, who, if half be true that was long after rumoured, had good cause to absolve of guilt the souls of those whose wild work had urged King Edward to the making of the vow he this day so fully redeemed.

And all these things being done, back turned that noble company; but in a sort far different was their return to the slow and funereal pace

of their coming hither. Here might be seen a gay group of young esquires, careering round the unvarying flat of some great meadow; their horses, pleased at their regained freedom, spurring the green turf in their pride, or flying away from the slackened rein; here, again, mustered some, proving alike their own horsemanship, and their beasts' haunches, by leaping over or into the wide drains everywhere intersecting this half-drowned land.

Opposite to these, scattered as fancy led, along the borders of a marshy tract of forest land lying on the left, ranged a long train of the superior nobles and ladies, accompanied by the King and his citizen friend the Ruward; some bearing hawks upon their fists, some having leashed greyhounds led by their sides, and each, as might be, unhooding the one, or slipping the other, as the startled game appeared; driven from their retreat by a numerous band of rangers, who beat about the cover with their long poles, making it ring again to their loud and merry cries. Along

the middle line of the road, the returning soldiers moved in glittering array, the bursts of whose martial music coming at intervals upon the ear, completed the enchantment of a scene made more glorious by the clear sky that canopied it in, and by a sun whose evening radiance mocked at the earthly splendour which it yet set so proudly off.

And where was now our hero during the light spurring of the joyous train thus wending homeward from the King's pilgrimage to the shrine of our Ladye? Alas! his pilgrimage was yet incomplete, his heart even now prostrate before *his* ladye's shrine; for in the lovely groups which rode, variously scattered here in the King's train, his searching eyes had not been slow to discover her whom alone they sought. Henceforth he continued to ride apart, but yet near enough to keep the object of his adoration ever in view; at length, by the sudden turn of a roused heron in high feather, whose flight all eagerly joined in following, the whole party of necessity crossed

his very path, and so near, indeed, that no choice remained for him but quickly to spur off, or quietly to rein up and abide their passage: he chose the latter expedient; many a beauteous upturned face, having no eyes but for the towering falcon and his prey, rode quickly by: at last came one who spurred less hotly on, by whose side his sworn friend James Audcley rode, pointing with forward hand to the proud bird's career; but her face was not up-raised, and her eyes, unlike the rest, had a wandering expression, as if in search of something nearer earth; at last she caught, at no great distance, the half watchful, half averted look of him who waited here to let the gay *cortège* pass. Suddenly her palfrey became checked, almost on to his haunches, either through her hand's involuntary motion on the rein, or from some instinct of his own; her head too was inclined evidently towards him who halted here, and lifting his bonnet from his brow the agitated Leonard bent low over his saddle-bow; when, on lifting his eyes, he beheld the ladye

again galloping onward with James Audeley's hand upon the rein of the palfrey he yet loudly chid for faltering in the course ; rooted, as we were, to the spot, the gazer long remained, with his strained eyes bent after them, and once again he beheld, or hope deceived him, her head turn in the direction where he stood ; a minute after, a bend in the road hid her from his sight, when pressing for a moment his hand above his wearied eyes, he withdrew it to recognize Sir Johan de Maltravers by his side. Together, for some minutes they rode on slowly and in silence, the continuance of which became yet more embarrassing to Leonard, than even comment would have been at the first moment of what he could not help feeling something like a detection.

“ You witnessed that last brave flight, Sir Johan ? ” he at length observed, willing to put an end to the annoying taciturnity of his companion.

“ Which do you mean—your flight or the birds ? ”

“My flight!—I speak of the soar of that Norway hawk, that rose here at the heron awhile back.”

“Um!” ejaculated the Knight, turning his large eyes upon the face of the youth: “you both *soar* so high, it is well, if ye become not dizzy with the flight and *fall*. Be wary, Leonard Borgia—I say again, be wary!”

“I make not clearly out these riddles in which you love to speak,” cried Leonard, with an awkwardly affected indifference of air. “I spoke of the falcon, which——”

“Pish—and I also,” hastily interrupted Maltravers; “I speak of a bold bird that hath made a right noble cast, so he career not over wildly having passed his true aim: but thus it will be ever—nature must out in all things, and the right falcon will never stoop at carrion, though you rear him in the jay’s nest.”

Here followed a second silence; and although the young man burned to check this seeming prying of his new friend, he was yet

so overawed by a certain intensity of manner, divesting the Knight's motives of all air of mere curiosity, and investing his speech in an almost paternal garb, that his tongue rejected the harsh words his fiery spirit on the moment urged, and he continued mute ; at length he managed to observe, but without turning his head—"How think you, were we not best ride on, since we have already loitered far behind all our company?"

"So much the better," quietly answered Maltravers : "ride yet by my rein awhile, I have a word to whisper to you."

"Say, on then, quickly," cried Leonard, almost afraid of the sound of his friend's voice, "for I must make quicker forward, else——"

"Else wilt thou be too late to catch one other glance of yonder raven-browed maiden, as she quits the palfrey James Audeley hurried so unthanked away a minute back."

Leonard started in his saddle ; he felt the hot blood mount to his very temples : with an eye of fire he turned on the speaker, who,

coolly laying hand upon his arm as he sought for utterance, went on—

“Reply not yet, but hear me further: I last night said that you *loved*—come, I know that you have questioned your heart, and it has answered I was in the right; I will now keep the promise I then made, and tell you with whom. How say you, need I name her? your heart even now spares me that labour—young man, you love the heiress of the Ruward of Flanders.”

“You are mad to say this,” cried Leonard, confounded yet restrained by the almost solemnity of manner assumed by his catechist.

“You are more mad to *do* this, I might retort,” replied Maltravers; “save that I seek not to bandy idle words, but only to fore-arm, to put you in possession of a truth you feared to whisper to yourself, and so to set you on your defence. You love this high-placed maiden—you die to see, to speak with her, you keep aloof that you may not be suspected, and yet,

if you play not the game better, will even, by so doing, draw suspicion on you."

Leonard was mute for a minute, when, fixing his glance upon the imperturbable face of his companion, he answered—

"You are surely a most strange being, thus to rule me like a chidden child, yet can I not quarrel with you for it."

"That assuredly canst thou not—but wherefore wouldst thou seek quarrel with the only man of all the thousands by whom we are surrounded, that cares for, or seeks thy welfare?"

"And wherefore do *you*?" demanded Leonard.

"Hah! pertinent, and well put; but not so shrewdly to be answered, since our caprices, although often strong, are not easily definable to reason; however, one cause I hinted at—I knew your father—now hear a second: you are *alone*, amidst this crowd, and so am I: the young know me not, or hear my story with suspicious wonder, and lift their eyes as I pass, to view me as a monster newly tamed—of the

old, few here are my friends, or ever were ; by the King's grace and favour I am again made their fellow, and free once more to jostle for my right of place ; but they view me with jaundiced eyes, and hating ; some also, who guess past secrets may yet be well minded by me, fearing, they seek by their lowered brows to keep me still a banished man and a shunned outlaw, as I have been unjustly and too long : now, *you* also, are fellow to none here, where fortune has happily placed you—esteemed by the King, I am sure—loved by James Audeley, I think—pitied by some, hated by many, envied by all, you stand upon a precipice edge ; one giddy turn will cast you down headlong, to rise no more—prostrate you, body and spirit for ever. Partly from this affinity of condition I sympathise thus with you, and more perchance from another cause, which may also be soon known to you ; meantime, confide in me or not, as may seem best to you ; when you need me I shall not fail to know it, and will give my service then, as I now tender my

advice, unbidden, and shall perchance continue then, as I now am, unthanked for my pains-taking."

"Not so," said Leonard, greatly moved by the desolate and touching tone in which the Knight had drawn this sketch of their joint loneliness, the which he felt to be, though sad, too true: "deem me not so ingrate and cankered in my nature; but I beseech you, tell me, how found you out the object of this mad love with which you charge me?"

"From yourself," calmly replied Maltravers; repeating, in answer to Leonard's new look of wonder, "aye, even from yourself; why, a man with only half an eye directed to that end, would not fail to read how your heart tends; hence my caution to be more wary, since, by the mother of all beauty, yonder wench has charms enough to stir up jealous watchers. I will not bid you directly to go on, nor yet would I have you fly so proud a fortune, for if I err not, that dark-browed damsel I beheld ride by here thought less of

the many she followed, than of the one she left behind ; but this as yet is idle guess-work, and no more : still I repeat, an ye are wise, be wary, let not unguarded burning looks, dull hearing, unsorted answers, or deep-heaved quivering sighs draw envious eyes upon you ; above all, tell the plain truth to yourself, although you think to hide it from me, so will you be more guarded—and now to change the subject : the King has this morning commanded me to select five hundred lances from amongst the Welsh borderers of the Prince's company, and to hold them in readiness to escort this Flemish ruler home to Ghent : last night you hinted that it was like enough old Master Borgia would be soon here ; now as I know not at what hour I may be ordered hence, take you this packet, and when he comes, lose no time in laying it before him : fail not, since it concerns your fortunes more closely than your wildest guess can hit ; so now fare we forward, with what haste you will, for I have said my say."

“Stay, one question,” cried Leonard, hesitating whilst he made the request; “goes Artevelde’s daughter with him, in your company?”

“A strange, blunt question for one so cold in his replies, and indifferent in the matter,” observed Maltravers, with a gravity through which a touch of humour shewed, continuing after a moment’s enjoyment of his companion’s confusion; “your question must for the present remain unanswered, for I am ignorant of the matter; but you will know in good time, since ’tis in my thought, in that case, to seek to have you joined in this command.” Leonard’s eyes sparkled, his whole countenance lightened up with joy, and he was about to speak, when Maltravers, laying a finger on his bridle, cried—“So! the road is rough before us, look well to your footing, and see you stumble not.”

He gave his horse free head as he concluded this last quaint admonition, and drew not again tight rein till he passed the gate of the town,

when, turning abruptly by the narrow street leading behind the Merkt-hall, he passed on his way without word or leave-taking.

The market-square Leonard found to be nearly impassable, from the crowds of holiday folk that thronged it ; making, therefore, the circuit of the Quays, he gained his own quarters, and, giving Cyril instructions to say he was ill at ease and a-bed, here passed in solitude the rest of the evening, giving a loose to fancies of every hue and shade engendered in the brain of a young lover, and hugging deeper into his heart the barb already rankling there.

He had at length indeed sought his bed, and was already asleep, when the voice of Audeley, in loud talk with Cyril, as with a strange halting pace they came together up the stairs, roused him again, just as his friend burst into the room, evidently excited beyond the limits of strict sobriety.

“ Tell me not of his being ill a-bed,” he exclaimed, as he thus entered the chamber,

“thou knave, that seekest to stay me with such an insufficient reason—since he who is ill at ease needs a cheer—why, how now, Borgia?” he added, approaching the bed and seating himself upon it, “art thou ill i’faith?—asleep, or only splenetic, or both?”

“A compound of the three will best describe my malady, good Sir Leech,” replied Leonard, smiling at the evident exaltation of his noble comrade.

“And here, then, wert thou earthed, whilst so many sought thee out?”

“Sought me?” repeated Leonard—“to what end, I pray?”

“To what end?—why sport, to be sure—to what end else, think ye?—ha, ha, ha! And rare sport, too, for those not made mad and melancholy by true love.”

“Who mean you is so made mad?” cried Leonard, uneasily hiding his chagrin.

“One who has some claim on thy pity, good Borgia, sighed Audeley, in a most lugubrious tone,—look in my face, and read the marks

of perplexity traced thereon—'tis love, sheer love, mad love—I could rhyme, Leonard, were I clerkly enough to have the trick of penman-craft."

"Nay, that is a symptom, in truth," cried Leonard, smiling partly at his friend's whimsical confession, partly at the alarm into which his own consciousness had betrayed him. "But say, who is this that hath so bewitched you? tell me, and I'll be your clerk when your brain needs deliverance."

"Oh, Borgia, she is a most passing creature, and by my cunning a gentle. Listen while I whisper to thy heart my folly! I am distraught through love of one on whose mere beauty I might have gazed unscorched, but before whose melody of voice I fall a helpless sacrifice; what thinkest thou of the daughter of this Flemish Commons' King? Oh, were she empress of the East, she would adorn her state! Nay, start not, good Borgia, since 'tis so—I am in love, and thou must listen to my ravings, and give me counsel and consolation—I die

for this princess of the *canaillerie*—this heiress of metheglin beer of Ghent, and broad cloth of Bruges ; and I would marry her ! Ay, stare on—I say, marry her ! simple if she be, although my eldest born might reproach me with the blot on his scutcheon ; but wouldst thou dream it, they tell me that this knave *brewer*—this King Colin, who rules, by no lawful right, but only by *vox populi*, as clerks have it—whose vast power hath to back it no shadow of reason or justice, but rests wholly upon the will of these brute citizens—these—”

“ Hold here, my Lord James,” interrupted Leonard, seeking to change a subject which, even in this gloom, he trembled to listen to ; “ you forget that you speak to one of those same brutes, called citizens.”

“ Cry a mercy, Leonard,” exclaimed the young aristocrat, laughing heartily—“ thou knowest the old saw—‘ wit and wine mingle not evenly, though they may run merrily, in company’—yet art thou no churl’s flesh, I’ll die else ; the blood of some old Roman baron, some

Sir Scipio or Pompey, or the thrice-renowned Sir Julius Cæsar, even now mingles in thy veins ; and I will maintain thee, Borgia, noble and gentle by nature, against all foul-tongued gainsayers.” Clasp^{ing} the hand of Leonard closely, he went on—“ But where was I ?— Oh !—aye—coupling wedlock and the dark-browed Bertha ; and I would on too, but for the raised fear that this Ruler, or Ruward, or Bear-ward—or whatever else be his style—would refuse my offer, which, it appears, is like enough.”

“ Indeed ! ” involuntarily cried Leonard.

“ Aye, indeed,” echoed Audeley. “ Now, it would pass Job’s patience, the which I boast not, to have such a peasant as this reject the best blood of Normandy—blood, which runs even to its kingly source without one blemish, save a chance taint inherited from a Saxon great great grandam, or some such, who my ancestor Rollo Audeley made an orphan in the Conqueror’s day, and after wedded, either out of pity that he had brained her hog father or for

the love of her broad lands, I know not which, nor care, since his taste was so beastly—but think, I say, of my being staved off by this beer-barrel ; I should wither with shame—die outright of vexation—which last fate is, in any case, like enough to be mine. So between two ill courses, which wouldst thou have me follow—peril a refusal, and so die of shame ? or smother my passion, and so pine for love ? Lo ! my confession ; and now, good sober, silent comrade, counsel me—at least speak to me—since I thirst fairly through my own prating.”

“ And when left you the ladye, to be in this present plight ? ” asked Leonard.

“ Oh, ’tis an age since she left me—I had quitted her never—on board of the Catherine. The King, thou must know, gave this close friend of his, this Ruward, a slight banquet there, to which came this peerless damsel of mine ; I sighed at her, prated to her, waited on her, watched her, till she vanished ; then drank till my brains reeled with quaffing nec-

tar in the shape of strong Spanish wine, out of the cup her honied lips had kissed—but where were you all this while? for I know you were sought for.”

“At whose command?—the King’s?”

“Aye, of one or other of the kings.—Oh, this Ruward spoke openly of you to his Grace, as now, I bethink me, the ladye did quietly to me.”

“The ladye speak to you of *me*?” repeated Leonard, almost breathless.

“Aye, marry did she,” idly replied Audeley, “and, as I think, praised some rare trick of horsemanship of thine.”

“Horsemanship!” cried Leonard, joyously tempting on the unconscious Audeley, “how was it?—I mind it not.”

“I dare swear thou dost not, and so much did I vouch for to the damsel; I told her how thine only dreams were of arms and battle, thy very talk a compound of all warlike phrases—such as—haut-peak, against demi-peak—the ’vantage of a glove armed with gadlings, over a

plain gauntlet, and a rowel, over a pryck-spur.”

“ Brave commendations these to a fair maiden’s ear,” exclaimed Leonard, smiling, too pleased even to affect a tone of resentment at Audeley’s banter.

“ Why is it not all true, thou iron-hearted varlet ?” shouted Audeley, laughing loudly : then again relapsing into a rueful mock-sentimental air, he sighed out—“ heigho ! I’d give the world for thy calm, unruffled heart, and cool head ; but I—I have within, a fire unquenchable ;—go-to, I see I have no sympathy from thee—Borgia, farewell ! thou art a dullard, I a drunken—so sort we badly with each other. Now know I not rightly what to do. If I bide within, I quarrel with myself ;—if I go out, ’tis ten to one but I quarrel with some other gentleman.”

Thus muttering to himself, Audeley rose from off the couch, and made as straight a course as he could from the room, closely followed by Leonard, who after left him not until he saw him fairly to his bed ; once there, he soon

talked himself to sleep, leaving his patient friend to seek again his own chamber.

“She looked upon me this day ! spoke of me this night when absent,” joyfully exclaimed Leonard, as he tossed sleepless upon his pillow, and with this flattering image, the warning words of Maltravers rose also to his heated fancy. “Yes,” he repeated, “I will look well to my footing, but I will also tread onward, upward, though, stumbling, I may sink to rise no more.”

CHAPTER II.

ON the following morning Leonard's delight may easily be conceived by him who has felt, and who has not ? the pain of a separation from the ladye of his love, for at a very early hour he was roused by a varlet, who came to desire his immediate attendance on the Ruward at his present lodging in the house of Van Heylen ; on the wings of love and hope he quickly hied thither, and had his brightest anticipations more than fulfilled, in, owing to the smiling Bertha, his introduction to Jacob Van Artevelde.

This great personage received our hero with

an ease and frankness of deportment which delighted him ; the name of Borgia, he said, had at one time been most familiar to him, “ and,” he laughing added, “ in merchant phrase, had ever proved a good name.” Once more had Leonard to undergo the ordeal of close question on the subject of the thrice told rescue ; in addition, being now called on to describe the appearance and bearing of the knightly ravisher ; which having done to his best ability, Artevelde found little difficulty in ascribing the assault to the right party.

When, in conclusion, Leonard rose to depart, the Ruward approached him, and, pressing his hand, fervently thanked him for the great service he had rendered to his adopted child.

“ I will not ask you,” he said, “ to name a reward, since I well know how best and soonest to prove my gratitude ; meantime, wear this for my love, and let it serve to assure you that in its once owner you ever have a true friend. Bertha, come thou near,

hung by thy dainty fingers these fetters will sit the lighter about the neck of our fair esquire here."

Disengaging, as he spoke, the massy golden chain he wore, the Ruward placed the splendid favour in the hands of the maiden, that she might do his bidding, which she performed aptly, although with half averted eyes ; and, as he rose from off his bended knee, never did knight newly made upon the very field of his glory, lift square banner with greater pride or more joy than our poor esquire felt as he raised to his lip the golden chain, thus cast by the hand of beauty round his willing neck.

Dismissed from the presence of the Ruward, Leonard had a second and a sadder ceremony to go through in a meeting with the aged sister of poor Van Heylen, who staid him in the vain desire of being able to extract from his lip a ray of hope on the matter of her brother's fate ; and without seeking to deceive, so well did Leonard, by the manner of his relation, advance himself into the favour of this ancient dame,

that from this hour he had free access to her house, since, as she said, "*he* was a fair youth, and a sober ! no ruffling make game or court gadfly, but the son of a good merchant ; one like themselves, a plain citizen and freeman, laying claim to no honour but such as his own head and hand might win."

And so well did he time these permitted visits, that, amongst the bustling and ambitious spirits who thronged this place, the movements of one so humble as the new esquire, passed unheeded, save by Maltravers, who, from time to time, continued his cautions ; or by Audcley, who yet continued to make our hero the depository of his love confidence.

At length, on the fifth day from the King's landing, the great meeting took place which was to decide the question of who should hereafter reign in Flanders. The gold supplied by Artevelde and England had already secured, in secret, many amongst the highest and most influential of the priesthood ; and with these came a crowd of nobles and knights,

the inheritors of honourable names, all anxious and expectant of the bribe. Here were, Adolphe Lord of Monti, Everard Count Lemberg, and the Lord of Brabant ; together with the powerful seigneurs of Konigsfoorde, Backquemont, Cuike, Nycers, and Falkemont, besides a tediously long list of names, equally sonorous and gentle. Lastly may be mentioned as present here the far more important but humbler titled commons representatives, the sturdy deputies from the rich cities of Ghent, Lille, Dourberg, Newport, Ypres, Cassel, and others ; and from this last order was it that the only symptoms of repugnance to the election of a stranger Prince arose, and amongst this last class it was, when least expected, that the legitimate sovereign Louis found here the sole defenders of his birth-right.

These men, so stout in asserting their own privileges, knew at the same time how to respect those which they held rightly to belong even to the tyrant against whose oppression they had so manfully risen, by whose intrigues

they were yet daily vexed; and in this time of trial these men remained proof against all the blandishments of a king whose friendship they had already proved, as well as against the mingled threats and arguments of their popular chosen chief; before whose lightest nod the nobles of the land were in a moment prostrate, deserting without scruple the fallen cause of their banished master, and openly bartering his rights, as they would have done their own souls, for a few hundred florins, and a new prince's smile.

For two whole days were these debates prolonged on board the huge Catherine, relieved by nights of feasting and revelry, whose splendid glitter ill concealed the dark intrigues rankling beneath the smiling surface. At length the hour for decision arrived, when, despite the Ruward's great influence, and the ready example of the high priests and nobles of the land, the best answer Edward could win from the honest deputies was a demand for time, to enable them to inform their constituents at their

several towns; in order as they said, to gain their voices on a matter of such deep import, whereon they might not of their own personal wills decide.

To this end then were they of necessity dismissed; with smiles and many fair words, did the politic Edward pray them only to hasten their kind office, declaring his fixed purpose to abide their return where he then was, concluding by saying he doubted not but their answer would be a joyful hearing to his young son, whose love their honesty had entirely gained.

Now also was it that the Ruward, in pursuance of his fixed resolution, hastened to determine the choice quickly, by flinging his own personal popularity, into the nicely balanced scale. Taking a hurried leave of the King, after a parting, more than usually prolonged and mournful, with her whom he called daughter, he forthwith departed under a guard of Welsh lances, commanded by Sir Johan de Maltravers and Sir William Sturrie—Leonard.

on finding that Bertha was to await where she now was, the Ruward's return, having declined the active service this occasion offered, notwithstanding the sarcasms with which his friend, Sir Johan, received his refusal to apply for permission to join the force under his direction, a suggestion at which he had once so gladly caught.

Leaving now the precincts of this holiday court, we will for a while follow in the footsteps of the great demagogue, on this the latest, greatest trial of his power. He from the first hour, hurried on with an impatience which soon threatened to shake off the presence of the active guard which Edward had appointed, for his honour as was given out, but really more with a view to his personal safety. This body was lightly armed, and well mounted, composed chiefly of hardy Borderers from the Welsh marches, selected under the careful eye of Maltravers himself; and, ranking with these, rode the daring few yet left, of his once "free band," men, of whose fidelity and courage he was well assured.

At Bruges where he first halted, the Ruward experienced no obstacle to his wishes ; he had but to state at full his views to the citizens assembled on his arrival in the great market, and, with his accustomed eloquence to remind them of their abasement under Louis, contrasted with their present free and prosperous condition ; also to darkly hint at the wide plot on foot for the tyrant's restoration ; ending, by pointing out the strong hand of the English Prince, as offering the only certain guarantee for not only the continuance of their liberty, but for the exclusive commerce of the rich fleeces of his father's kingdom.

The last hint was conclusive, amongst the patriot cloth-workers of Bruges ; even before he could put the question, was his desire anticipated, and “ Long live Prince Edward, Duke of Flanders ! ” shook the old merkt-tower as though it came from some one mighty voice, so loud, so simultaneous was the acclamation.

Dispatching back to the King a messenger with these well omenced tidings, the Ruward,

pausing but one day and night with the Brúgeois, who had collected great store of cheer from all parts, wherewith to make him welcome, struck suddenly off to the right for Ypres, instead of pressing straight on for Ghent, as he had given out, and indeed designed, until he was overruled in this purpose by the advice of some who were either unlucky or treacherous—and through this chance error it was that his eager and long watching foes got start of him, at the very moment too when their fortunes were most desperate.

Denise and his party had, indeed, been completely surprised by the unexpected nature of Artevelde's present stroke, and the rapidity with which the resolution was hurried along, threatened to anticipate and for ever paralyze their plans.

At this critical juncture, Conrade Stetten, just landed, became apprised of the strange doings at Sluys, and, hurrying with a small force to the neighbourhood of Ghent, thence made known to the revengeful Deacon of the

weavers' guild, that his master, Count Alaine, was every hour expected at Rerefonde, whither he had compelled the English mariners to carry him, whilst Barberoux, freighting Croquart's free lances, and accompanied by many French and Flemish knights, must, in a few days at most, be off the Scheldt.

On this news the courage of the burgher conspirators was revived; Conrade clearly pointed out to them that the very hour was come to bring the cause to issue; that a day's inactivity would see the Ruward back, and Prince Edward elected, when all hope must for ever cease; and in the end wrought them to resolve to try their strength before the appearance of Artevelde in a public and open attempt, since already every private means had been put in force to decry his aim, and blacken the motive which prompted him to the introduction of this foreign Prince; a matter by no means difficult amongst an easily inflamed and ever turbulent populace, let loose for a brief space from the wholesome weight of the master hand,

since they dreaded the severity of their ruler as much as they relied upon his even justice.

On the very morning then—so critical is an hour or twain in man's career—which beheld Artevelde turn westward for Ypres, there halted before the convent of St. John, where during his stay he had lodged, a courier whose spent horse fell as the man lighted down out of saddle, and who, as he panting told, bore tidings from Ghent for the Ruward, which were of life and death.

Quickly remounted from the well furnished stables of the alarmed Prior, the courier again passed onward in pursuit of his master ; along the road the straggling horsemen of the guard, whom he came up with on his way, sufficiently indicated the speed which Artevelde himself had used, their horses being sore jaded and windblown. Thus following with hot spur, the wearied man reached Ypres just in time to be cheered by the first burst of applause which hailed the proposal of the Ruward, and proclaimed that at Ypres as at Bruges,

the Prince of Wales was unanimously chosen by the people's voice for their future sovereign.

It was not until after the press before the cathedral had in part divided, that the courier was able, even with the willing aid of the populace, to struggle within sight of his master, whose keen eye, attracted by the eager gestures of the man, immediately recognised one of his confidential retainers, and retiring apart, desired to have him brought quickly into his presence. The trembling fellow had no sooner entered than he produced the hastily scrawled packet he bore ; and startling indeed were the tidings herein penned by Philip de Courtressin.

“Even as I write,” the writer continued, after a description of the first symptoms of tumult, “the assembled people listen at each public place, with gaping mouths, to those who openly accuse you of having sold this country to the English King, and other monstrous things which never might gain credit in any

ears save those of these besotted villains, who readily gulp down this poison to the honour of their fastest friend.

“ Meantime the efforts of those best liked of the burghers have been made in vain to stay the flood and cause the arrest of Denise ; the mob is in fact fairly broke loose, and we possess not in your absence the strength to cudgel the beast to quiet, being the only fit argument to use on such carrion—again I pause to hearken more ill news, and learn now that many of your paid followers have been slain in the streets, as singly they sought to gain this house, wherein almost a prisoner, I will, with the help of the stout fellows assembled here, abide your coming, so long as we can hold out against these curs, yelping about your walls.

“ Pray use haste, since I think they will fly before your face, if not for fear yet in very shame, and so also think your friends—therefore, I repeat, haste, haste, or all is lost ! If Bertha be with you, kiss her hands for me, but

bring her not here, for truly this house of yours is no maiden's bower just now—speaking of maidens, pray heaven that fair unknown you were so curious about be not now in Ghent—I'd rather know she were in Cyprus, so I were but free to follow after.

“Brauer, who bears this, hath my orders to spare neither flesh nor iron. Come you in by the north gate, which Ivan holds, and will hold for a month to come, against the rabble here on foot.—Adieu.”

Such was the tenor of the hasty letter, penned by the Ruward's own wild brave boy, unconscious that he addressed a father. Suppressing all outward exhibition of dismay at this ill news, the chief turned with a calmed brow to those near him, and, briefly stating that some pressing matter called for his presence in Ghent, gave orders for such preparations to be made as would enable him to depart immediately after the banquet, at which he was informed the magistrates and burghers awaited his presence.

Calling to him Maltravers and Sturrie, he in brief entrusted to them the true state of Ghent, and his resolution to proceed thither without pause, whilst on their parts they unhesitatingly promised to keep by him, with as many of their riders as could hold pace with them ; and in order to facilitate this object, Maltravers ordered the best horses and most resolute men to be picked from the rest, and casting from the saddles every article not absolutely essential for present service, gave these directions forthwith to push leisurely forward two or three leagues of the way, there to abide the Ruward's coming.

In the dead hour of the same night, the people's honoured guest arose, and quitted the bright blaze of the civic feast, at which no man who beheld him play his part could have surmised the care pressing upon the brain of the Ruler, or of the more painful apprehensions tugging at the heart of a fond father, yet unknown as such to the son of his love, now standing in imminent danger.

Departing from this scene of festivity, where every tongue spoke welcome, and where every face was dressed in smiles, the weary Ruward, attended by Maltravers and Sturrie, and followed by the main body of his guard, once more took to the road, and hotly spurred on for Ghent, where there was reason to apprehend, aspects less pleasing awaited him.

It was impracticable, at the pace they now travelled, for the body of the horsemen to keep pace with the chiefs ; orders were therefore given to those in command to follow as they best might, carefully avoiding coming to blows if possible. The *élite*, amounting to some four score lances, on being overtaken, managed to keep in company onward, and they after drew not bit, nor scarce pulled up until, being arrived within some half league of their destination, the advance guard was suddenly arrested by a shout rising from out a low cover on the right, and immediately after three sturdy men, clad in the costume which distinguished the personal followers of the Ruward, leaped into the road,

to be instantly hailed by their master just then riding up.

"Now, Gortz," he demanded, "what ill game play you, lurking like cut-purses, behind this bush here, to scare honest travellers? What, lout, hast lost thy glib tongue at last? You, Walther Rodenbach, or Arlot, do you speak, and tell me what you seek here at this early hour."

"We bide here by order of young Count Philip," answered Arlot, with an air of embarrassment, "to bid you go back, since your friends think it little advisable that you tempt the great danger at this time awaiting you, within our walls."

"I have looked upon danger too often when seeking to protect those same walls, to flinch now from any peril they can encompass," cheerfully cried Artevelde; "and, God willing, will look into the angry eyes of these misled men, whose light heads have been so suddenly turned against me. But now, Sir Knights," he added, turning to the English leaders,

“let me forbid your marching farther this same way; accompanied by these three trusty knaves of mine own I am enough guarded, if security may be won by persuasion and the awakened remembrance of what is due to my authority—the which I doubt nothing—your numbers, in the worst case, could only delay for a few minutes my fall, whilst your lives would doubtless pay the forfeit of your loyalty to a lost cause.”

“Your pardon, honoured sir,” answered Maltravers, “but in this we cannot obey you, seeing that our liege sovereign’s orders were to guard you, even with our lives, back into his presence; this, therefore, are we bound to do, or, at least, strive for to the uttermost, come what may; so, for fear of the worst, let us be prepared—light down lances, and let each man now prove his beast’s girths, and draw tight the buckle of his own belt—then, Sir Ruward, lead you on and pin[^] fast faith on my word, that you come to no bodily harm

so long as the arm of any one here has pith enow left to hold point before you.”

A determined hurrah followed this soldier speech, and was succeeded by the rattle of the men's harness as they dismounted to make preparation for sudden action.

The Ruward looked on for a moment in silence ; then, taking the hands of the two knights, heartily thanked them, and all, ending with, “ Well, be it even so then, we will still on in company ; but, I beseech you, strike no blow the while safety may be found in calm endurance.”

It was just six o'clock by the loud bell of St. Bavian's when the Ruward, entering by the north gate, directed those of his guard who had hitherto held it to quit the post and follow. He was already recognized by the early stirrers of this quarter, and the news of his arrival was evidently being fast circulated far and near ; he movèd, notwithstanding, slowly along, and although few cries of ill will had yet been

ventured, still the absence of all that welcome and veneration to which he had been ever used was in itself proof of a change sufficiently fearful.

As the way-worn troop thus soberly defiled along the narrow streets in their line of march, it was easy to observe that the intelligence of their movements found a tongue much quicker than the pace they used ; for, as they came on, casements were seen to fly open far in their advance, and on to the balconies rushed half-clad men, some eyeing the passing chief with a dark scowl, whilst by others he was hailed with deriding fingers, or the loud laugh of scorn.

Here and there, too, was a door half opened, thrust over which might be caught the uplifted warning hand or pitiful look of some friendly burgher, whilst lower down shewed the pale, anxious face of his wife, and near to the ground, peeping forth with wonder and delight, the chubby, laughing features of the naked children of the house, waked from their

slumbers by the wide-prevailing cause, but happily unconscious of its terrors.

“We had best mend our pace now,” cried Maltravers, coming from the rear close to the Ruward’s side, “the horses are again in good wind, and, truth to tell, I love not the look of matters behind us here, rascals on flying foot cross one another at every turn, doubtless the bearers of some signal for the *canaille* to muster—and, hark ! even now you may hear there is the sound of hasty gathering in our advance.”

Here one of the *avant-garde*, which had just gained the sharp ascent of the bridge in front, galloped in to report that crowds of men were rushing from all quarters into the great Paverd-merkt, mostly armed, and assembling evidently with a design, from the position they had taken, to oppose the Ruward’s passage to his house.

“Spur we right onward then,” cried Artevelde, rousing himself from the stupor of sorrow into which he had fallen, “we must

for very security win that, since I find it is the only door I may now hope to see open for my shelter within these wide walls."

" Ride hard, men," shouted Maltravers, pressing his own horse with the spur, and readily followed by the whole troop at a brisk canter. As the foremost horsemen gained the bridge, from whose summit the Hotel d'Artevelde was seen on the opposite side of the square, they became aware that the report just heard was unexaggerated as to the gathering there ; whilst nearer to them came silently on a large party of stalwart, half-clad craftsmen of the lowest class wheeling forward a couple of heavily laden cars, with which to block up the narrow passage from the bridge.

" Just in time, see here !" ejaculated Sturrie.

" And barely," echoed Maltravers, as with the silent Ruward they together dashed on in anticipation of the evident design.

" What unruly tumult is here ?" now called forth Artevelde in an authoritative voice, as this working party, seeing their intention de-

feated, deserted the cars and hastily fled like startled deer before the advance of the cavaliers.

Flinging back his hood, and raising his bonnet from off his head, the demagogue chief pressed fearlessly forward, till he soon became mingled with the alarmed skirmishers of the malcontents, and, almost unattended, was rapidly closing with the main body of the mob, drawn up right before the front of his own mansion ; the upper windows of which he could see filled with eager faces watching the result of his approach.

“ Way there !” shouted his faithful runners, by an active effort once more heading his advance, and preceding him with the cry so lately only heard to be obeyed—“ Way there for the Heer Jacob !”—“ Way for the Ruward !”

The sudden appearance of these men, and the fearless tone of their accustomed cry, produced for a moment its ancient effect upon the people, who mechanically pressed back on each other to give their magistrate free egress to his home.

“Pause not so, but forward,” whispered the observant Maltravers in the ear of the Ruward —“forward promptly, and trust them not.”

Artevelde had already, in fact, deceived by this returning shadow of his name's magic, checked his horse for the purpose of holding an inquiry into the cause of discontent even where he now was, but the shrewd warning of Maltravers was followed by demonstrations of such determined purpose that rendered delay, or indeed any but the most active and promptest measures hopeless.

“Down with him!” “Down with the English!”

“He has betrayed us.” “Give us up the gold, we're sold for.” “No English Prince—Count Lewis for ever!” “Kill, kill, kill!” These and similar cries were bellowed from thousands of throats.

Along the front line of the thickening mass might also be now distinguished, men-at-arms fully harnessed, running busily to-and-fro; the

wings on this began to develope themselves and to move gradually outwards, the main body *in the meantime every moment growing thicker* from fresh comers pouring in; a few ill-aimed bolts and arrows too began to fall about the small force which hitherto had moved compactly on towards this darkling array.

“ A charge only now can save us,” here whispered Maltravers, who had been coolly observant of the above-told dispositions.

“ Best give me up to their will,” replied Artevelde, “ than do such slaughter amongst these misled fools.”

As he spoke, an arrow struck the foremost of his runners on the brow, and as the man reeled back and fell under the horse's feet, the previous yell of the people was succeeded by almost perfect silence, through which was distinctly heard the increasing quickness of the tramp of the two wings that pressed forward to inclose the cavaliers.

“ Sound trumpet,” shouted Maltravers, in

answer to the Ruward. “Down lances, all, and charge bravely after me. Cry ‘a Thirlwall for Artevelde!’”

“St. George, St. George!” shouted Sir William Sturrie, in the same breath; and leveling their lances, the chiefs dashed on together, whilst the two war-cries burst cheerily from the gallant band as they thundered after to the charge.

The well made shock bore back the foremost of the mob, the dense mass bent before the levelled lances of these hardy men as heavily laden corn bows before the gale; but their numbers were immense and lacked not resolution, so that whilst beaten down in front, they quickly re-formed in the rear and on the flanks of their assailants, who in spite of their best exertions, made slow way and kept small space free, having hands raised against them on all sides, whilst their war-cry was replied to and drowned in the roar of—

“Ghent, Ghent!”—“Ghent for Lewis!”

—"Rerefonde for Ghent!" and other less prevailing words of order.

"We are hemmed in by countless droves of these wolfish curs," cried Sturrie to Maltravers, as they struck together. "We have no chance, being spent, but to yield to rescue."

"Or die with the blade bare, which is wiser than to put faith in wolves' words," coolly retorted the Knight; as wheeling short, he sought to make another rush onward.—When at the word, they beheld the mass before them agitated from some new cause, waving irregularly about, and evidently becoming less dense and impenetrable in front—whilst clear above the *mêlée*, rose the near shout of—

"A Courtressin!" "A Courtressin for the Ruward!"

"Hah, hah! it is my son, my gallant daring boy," exclaimed Artevelde, who, up to this moment, had been mechanically impelled forward without striking blow.—"It is my Philip, save him, save him!"

“Forward,” again commanded Maltravers ;
“charge stoutly, in God’s name !”

“Charge for Courtressin, to the rescue !”
continued Artevelde, as rising in his stirrups, he waved his unstained sword above his head, now dashing foremost upon the still wavering mass.

One other desperate struggle and our little band encountered the friends to whom they were indebted for this well timed diversion from the house.

“My son, my son,” cried Artevelde, as dropping his at length bloody sword, he clasped within his arms the handsome stripling, who rushed to meet him bearing a heavy poleaxe in his ungloved hand ; for Philip wore no particle of defensive armour, but stood in his falconer’s dress as was his wont, unbonnetted, with his raven hair floating in the morning’s breeze and his dark eyes sparkling like living fire, with a fury never before awakened in his soul.

“You are safe, sir,” he joyfully cried, “but let us back within doors as we soonest may,

for, St. Mark! *this is no place for long greeting.*
“Ho,” he next shouted, “let the horsemen pass in first, whilst we keep these hounds at point that again seek to bay us.”

So saying, the youth rushed back to cover the rear of the lances yet left mounted, close followed on foot by the two English leaders, whilst the advance having by this time gained the house, so galled the foremost of the mob, by their well-aimed arrows shot from the windows, that not a man or horse were left behind that had strength to gain this bravely-kept shelter.

The last to enter within the doorway, was Sir Johan de Maltravers, whose prodigious force and unwearied activity had made him well known, and dearly taught the stanchest of the pack which so savagely bated him to dread the sweep of his heavy blade.

CHAPTER III.

WITH the loss of half their number the present breathing place was thus fairly won ; but one minute of consideration sufficed to inform the leaders how temporary must prove this hard-earned security, despite the utmost exertions of despair. for the numbers without were momentarily increasing, and even to hold these maddened besiegers from instant assault, required such an incessant flight of bolt and arrow as must speedily exhaust that now most efficient arm.

“ Well, sirs, what remains next to be

done?" demanded the imperturbable Maltravers, coolly stalking into the rearward hall, after having taken a hasty view of the defences; "for, judging by the hot preparation on foot without, we shall be permitted but scant time for council."

Artevelde, who, immediately on coming within the house, had retired to his own chamber, re-entered the hall as the Knight yet spoke; but, without replying to his question, eagerly demanded, "Where is my son?" After repeating twice the same enquiry without receiving any answer from the bewildered and terrified domestics, who gazed in stupid wonder upon him, and then upon each other, he appeared suddenly to recollect himself, and, in a more composed tone, added, "Where is the young Philip, I would say?"

"I am here, sir," replied the youth in person, bounding as he spoke down the great stair leading to the upper rooms in front of the large building. "But this, sir, is no place for you to abide longer in; come, the court-yard

behind is yet unassailed, and the wall on the canal manned by a score stanch fellows under Backhuisen ; your barge lies all ready in the dock ; once in that, and you may yet be passed without the walls to try a chance for life whilst we find employment as long as may be for this hungry *racaille* in front here."

"Not so," replied Artevelde, with singular composure, and in his usual decided manner where aught concerning himself was proposed, "I will never fly one foot before these besotted rebels against themselves ; but shall presently address them. Before that time however, Philip, I have a last charge to make to thee, therefore follow me—and you also, I pray, Sir Knight," he added, turning to Maltravers, who was busily employed breaking a loaf of bread into pieces, which portions he appeared to divide equally between himself and his horse, first dipping each into a wine-can near him.

"I will not long detain you," said the Ru-

ward, motioning him after, and Sir Johan, quitting his occupation, followed into that small chamber, whose window has been before described as looking over the wide court-yard.

How different was its aspect to the time when he last looked from that window upon the then calm and well-ordered area ; it was now paced by a motley crowd of fierce-looking men, and trembling, disconcerted domestics, employed in procuring wine and other provender from the well stocked cellars, and retarding each other in their ill-managed, eager haste.

After casting a hasty glance over this strange scene, the Ruward took from a drawer a small packet, and, placing this within the hands of the attentive Philip, said, in a low but impressive voice—

“ Witness, Sir Knight, that by this document I do here acknowledge this Philip, called, of Courtressin, for my son and lawful heir.”

“ How, sir, your heir ?” cried Philip, not

comprehending more, since Artevelde was wont at times to call him by the tender name of son.

“ My lawful heir, and fondly loved son,” repeated the Ruward ; “ but by those papers shall you learn hereafter all I am forbidden at present to tell. Now come here within my arms, and receive the embrace, perhaps the last, of your new-found parent, and then let us to our posts, to try what yet remains of safety for us.”

There was a solemnity about the manner of the Ruward which made these otherwise ordinary words peculiarly touching, and the conviction that this disclosure, although so simply made, was nevertheless true, at once forced itself upon the perception of Maltravers, whilst it failed to rouse a suspicion of the fact in the breast of Philip : this, Artevelde in a moment detected, as the youth, respectfully pressing his hands to his lips, answered—

“ You are, indeed, have ever been my father, since I have known no other.”

Looking on his true son as he thus spoke

and acted, the eyes of the unacknowledged father filled with tears, but, checking Maltravers, who was about to explain his conviction of the matter, he took him aside within the arch of the deep-sunk window, saying—

“ See, he knows it not—dreams not of it! My only son sees not in me his parent ; but so, ’tis better in an hour like this; therefore leave it so; and, if I fall, still keep it from him for a time, lest he betray the secret to these tigers, who would, thus roused, have no pity on blood of mine. Philip,” he continued, beckoning the youth, “ place thou that packet within the hands of this Knight, and before the King hereafter all will be told, that it concerns my heir to know.”

“ But, Bertha, sir, your adopted Bertha ?” said the perplexed Philip, in an enquiring tone, looking significantly upon the packet he resigned.

“ Hah !—what of Bertha ?” cried Artevelde, then, comprehending the remonstrance, he went

on—"Oh! fear not for my Bertha, she is amply cared for; but now, Philip de Courtressin, in a word, for we have scant time—you—you love not your cousin Bertha?—you would not of choice wed with her?"

Philip was silent for a moment, and then made frank answer, "I love Bertha, as one may love a dear sister, surely; but no more, and——"

"It is enough," interrupted Artevelde, "I seek not to hear further; but guard her rights as you would my life, or your true father's, were he here; see no wrong done her—Rerefonde and others will, if they can, despoil her, but must not whilst you live to play her champion!—swear this."

"Whilst I live, Bertha shall abide no wrong. I swear this," solemnly repeated Philip, touching with his lip the cross of his dagger.

"And now," said the father, struggling to hide his feelings, and looking significantly at Maltravers, as he fondly enfolded his son within his arms—"Take you note, Sir Knight,

that I here clip about the only and sole heritor of all that may be now saved or after rendered back of my wrecked fortune ; for as surely as these men are at this time mad, so surely will they, when in a wiser mood, repent of their present blind fury, and seek to render justice to my memory."

The unconscious son yet rested locked in his parent's close embrace, when a terrific crash came from the direction of the near court, accompanied by loud huzzas, and the gathering rush of many feet.

Maltravers sprang to the window, and a glance sufficed to put the soldier in possession of the fact.

"St. George!" he cried, "these subtle louts have made a wide breach in the wall of the building that flanks the right of the court," and through this come pouring on like the waves over a wreck—

"Hah, St. George! hold, *racaille*," he fiercely shouted, dashing open the casement with his mailed hand, then addressing himself to the

cross-bows ranged on the canal wall opposite, who stood for a moment lost in amaze, he cried, "So, round quick, quick, good fellows, the curs will cut ye off else."

Roused by this cry, the men first poured a shower of well-aimed bolts on the gathering party, which checked for a minute the vigour of their entrance, then running close by the opposite flanking wall gained the platform before described as extending along the whole of this front of the hotel; a position it was evident they could not hope to keep for any time, as the gap on the right was widening every moment, and the numbers pouring in threatened soon to fill the whole of this wide area.

The breach in question had been begun in a neighbouring house adjoining the stable, but so well was it planned, and so silently carried on, that, until the moment of the assault, no suspicion had been awakened.

"Open the door, and give those poor knaves of mine entrance while we may," was the first order of the Ruward, as glancing from the win-

dow he beheld the unsheltered condition of his faithful fellows.

“Hurry first to the front, my hardy and nimble-footed young esquire,” said Maltravers to Philip, “and bid hither as many as may yet live or be securely spared of mine own ancient bullies; cry ‘a Thirlwall,’ and you’ll know them, for they’ll follow that cry nimbly, and never question whither you lead them; be speedy, for I see these saucy *kaus*-eaters are mustering for an assault—with battering engines too! good, good, ha, ha, ha!” and the knight laughed a grim laugh, full of his free-rider spirit, adding, “Oh, that they were thus swarming in plain field, and but one hundred of my once *compagnie* in saddle by our sides! we’d make a day’s sport for these *Jacques*, their very grandchildren should tremble to hear named.”

And now the column in question being compactly formed, began indeed to advance steadily towards the steps leading on to the platform; those in front were mostly well-armed with long

bright pikes and gay partisans, the plunder of the armoury of the Burgher-guard, which the rebels had just gained, and in the rear came some score fellows, bearing a huge beam upon their shoulders, the purpose of which was evident, as well as that before its weight the stout hall-door must yield at a single blow.

The brave cross-bow men, covered in part by the balustrade, still shot freely and well together from the stoop, or terrace, doing much execution amongst these assailants, but their numbers were every minute becoming less beneath the missiles of every kind showered upon them.

Now it was that Artevelde, throwing open the remaining half of the casement, stepped upon the window seat—here having the upper portion of his person wholly exposed to assault, he leaned forward, and spreading his arms to those below, demanded, in the name of the saints, to know what they sought so madly, and how he had offended, so to lose their love ?

At his well-known voice, the movement of the column of attack was stayed, the missile war on both sides ceased, and silence was again effected amongst those of the mob by the mere sight of one thus bare-headed and alone, whose slightest movement they had been so long accustomed implicitly to obey.

“ If I have in any thing offended,” he continued, “ as being but a man, and not infallible, I may do wrong—I pray you deal not by me otherwise than justly, for who amongst ye can accuse me of ever meting any less measure to the poorest or vilest. Render me, then, but back, I say, that justice now, which in my time has never been withheld within these states to the veriest criminal.

“ Ye call me traitor—alas ! what a word to my ear—who have I betrayed ? Ye accuse me of robbing my fellow citizens—speak, are not you, all of ye assembled here, my fellow citizens ? Answer, then, any one among ye, and tell me, if I be rich, who has waxed the poorer by my rule ?

“ Let the artisan reply, whose handicraft has never failed to supply him with good store and to spare ; let the husbandman answer, whose grain ever found here safe market, and fair price ; or come forth the merchant, and let him say, if it was not *I* who raked together the dying embers of our trade, and with my breath and credit fostered it again until it rose up into a blaze that lights all Europe at this day, and makes our little commonweal more famous throughout the world than are the wide spread empires of the East.

“ These matters can ye not deny, since they are known truths, things born all within the memory of the youngest armed against me here ; and now in recompense for all ye seek my life, and, blindly led by desperate men, would rush on that, the children of this country yet unborn shall grow to curse ye for, when loaded with a despot's chains they look back upon the days of my rule, and groan for their lost freedom ; for if you slay me here, I say the

freedom of this land will in my bubbling blood be sunk, drowned, and for ages."

His words were here suddenly checked by the deep grief which overcame him, and covering his face with his hands, he wept bitterly.

The caprices of a wanton mob are ever liable to quick revulsion, if once they pause for breath; and already there arose, out of the deep silence that waited on his words, such muttered expressions as—

"Shame! Shame!" "Let us go back!" "See, if he does not weep!"—whilst many more cried—"Fear not; we will depart peaceably, since we see we have wrong'd thee, Jacob."

To what extent this growing feeling might have soon spread, 'tis useless now to surmise; for, at this period much stir and bustle was suddenly occasioned by some new comers, amongst whom the tall gaunt form of Denise was conspicuous as he forced a passage towards the window, with loud cries of—

“ Make way ! ” “ Make way ! ” “ If he be honest, let him come boldly forth, and without fear.”

“ I fear not,” said Artevelde, again raising his head. “ In teaching the men of Flanders to despise fear, I learned myself to forget its existence ; think not I now weep for myself ; no—it is for my country I weep, and for you ; still less for you than for your poor babes, who, innocent of this day’s outrage, yet must suffer for it.”

“ We seek not your personal harm, but only an account of your evil dealing in the state,” here called out, in a loud voice, an armed esquire, who, surrounded by half a dozen fully harnessed men-at-arms, at this time came up by the side of Denise. “ Come thou down, therefore,” he continued, “ and explain to the people, who may ill hear thee from that height, and I swear to protect thee from any bodily wrong.”

“ If this be as ye say,” calmly answered the Ruward, “ come ye back peaceably on the morrow, having, meantime, considered on

your wishes ; and to your deacons, or to all of ye in a body, I will fully prove my honesty and great love towards Flanders."

"What, thou wouldst be off after the shipload of plunder sent by thy bastard wench to England?" yelled Denise.

"Thou art a foul tongued knave," retorted the Ruward, with dignity ; "I would it were as easy to mend thy wit and decency, as to prove thee, in all thou hast last uttered, a base fellow, and a wilful liar."

"Do this now, then—prove these things here, an they be so easy," tauntingly retorted Denise.

"Here, thou knowest, am I, one of the deacons of the people ; here be Hans Zoheer, and Carl Cuyler, two others : all good men and true—how many more dost thou need ? since we can witness for thee to the rest : come down quickly then, ere we fetch thee, an thou beest not turned coward as well as thief, and tell, if thou canst, how thou hast disposed of the vast treasures of this land, to-

gether with the revenues of the poor starving Prince Lewis, who was never meant to want, as well as those of *les Avoles*, the nobles, whom thine avarice has banished from their homes, the better to despoil their goods."

"May I be freely heard to answer all this, before ye judge me?" asked the Ruward, aloud, "since ye are many here, and I am but one man."

"You may!" "You may!" screamed the excited populace, "Come down, and fear not."

"And that your person shall be safely guarded from present violence, I here pledge you the word of a Brabant gentleman," offered in addition, the same esquire who had before spoken.

"And who is he of Brabant, that now offers this?" enquired the Ruward, leaning forward.

"Conrade Stetten," replied the soldier, lifting the vizor of his basinet, "esquire to

Alaine, Lord of Rerefonde, the protector of the liberties of the free Gantois."

"A Rerefonde!" "A Rerefonde for Ghent!" bellowed the tickled beast populace.

"Ha! is it indeed so? then is this deeply laid," inwardly exclaimed Artevelde, adding, aloud, "yet now will I come down, on your faith, sir esquire, since I know your master would not take even my life coward-like, or while lying under pledge."

So saying, he retired from the window, amidst the hurrahs of the people, some of whom cheered thus at what they considered a triumph, but most only to fill up the cry. Artevelde, on descending, found himself eagerly surrounded by most of his small garrison, who, during this truce, had mustered here; and, having heard all that had passed, now endeavoured, by every means in their power, to change his purpose, but in vain; he repulsed them back with an air kindly, yet too determined to be mistaken; and staying not till he

came to the door, desired that it might presently be set open, yet only was he obeyed when, with his own hands he sought to draw loose chain and bar.

“Trust not these changelings, sir, I implore you,” cried Philip, entreating him to the last, “for they are thankless, and less-stable in their wills than are the sands of Syria.”

“Go not you forth thus,” added Maltravers, “we are yet within here, well nigh upon three score good men, not counting those few brave hearts outside; set open the door, and let me in the name of the King, my master, parley for rescue, or failing, let us defy them to the death, and so fall upon them;—by my soul, do not doubt but they’ll think twice, after the lesson we shewed them at the other side the house, ere they again loose desperate men, and, besides present peril, draw down the after-anger of England on their heads.”

This advice, so wholesome, at this moment, however, the Ruward rejected, again confirmed by the recently effected calm, in the confidence

with which he had been long accustomed to regard his own influence, and proud of the exhibition of this power over the people he persisted in his course with the wilfulness of a doomed man ; the door being thrown open, he first called in the remaining few of those who had so well defended the terrace, next commanded that no man should follow him, and then stepped slowly but determinately forth, receiving, as they filed inward, the salute of his followers, who formally presented their partizans as, when he appeared in ceremony was their wont, and this accustomed act of homage was replied to by a long continued shout from the living mass now crowding, not only the wide area of the court-yard, but the roofs of the low range of buildings flanking it, and the high wall of the canal opposite.

Calmly descending full half the steps to where Conrade Stetten stood, together with Denise, and the two or three other deacons who had joined the conspiracy to restore Count Lewis, the Ruward paused here, and stretching

forth his right arm, cried in a loud, clear voice—"Lo ! where I stand, weaponless, without other guards than yourselves, and unharnessed, save in mine honesty, which is of proof past taint, even by the sharp-pointed tongue of envy : Now then where are my accusers, and of what am I guilty ?"

"Art thou not ?—answer," cried Denise, without raising his eyes, and speaking in a low guttural tone, his livid features growing more pallid, if possible, as he spoke, "art thou not Jacob Van Artevelde, a robber ?—a—a murderer ?"

"Denise," replied the Ruward, calmly, "these are but the words of one distraught from wicked malice, and need not answer of mine ; yet shew me one proof that——"

At this word, the last ever spoken by the mighty demagogue of Flanders, the wily rufian darting adroitly past the unsuspecting Conrade, plunged his knife up to the gripe in the body of the speaker, and shrieking forth—"He is slain—the tyrant is slain !" clasped his arms about the wounded man, who, falling

heavily forward, bore his murderer with him to the ground.

Shrinking from this fearful overthrow, the astounded mob involuntarily bore back some paces, gazing with stupid wonder at those fallen so suddenly ; but before Denise yet sought to quit his victim, upon whose body he had thrice repeated the stab, the enraged Conrade sprang from off the steps, and planting firmly his armed foot upon the wretch's body, furiously exclaimed—

“False villain, thou hast cast a stain upon the faith of a born gentleman, and shalt die the death for it, were we in sanctuary.”

Before the sentence was complete, the weapon had fallen, and the cloven skull of the faithless assassin lay, a ghastly sacrifice, upon the breast of the slain Ruward.

“Hold ! what have you done ?” called out many near voices. .

“Brained an ass and liar,” fiercely retorted Stetten, “who hath basely jeopardded my name, and ruined your cause ; had we secured him that lies there, the game had been ours,

but as it now is——hold above there ! hold hands all !” he here shouted, running up the steps, on perceiving a struggle commencing within the doorway, mingled with fierce imprecations and threatening cries, adding——“ Yield all you within to mercy, and ye are safe.”

The present stir was occasioned by an impulse of Philip, who seeing from the window the Ruward fall, had rushed for this door with the mad intent of sallying sword in hand upon the multitude, to revenge his guardian's blood : he was at the first with difficulty restrained by those about him, until at last Maltravers fairly lifting him within his arms, bore him again to that private chamber, in order there to calm him back to reason.

“ How may we trust *your* word for our safety if we so yield ?” disdainfully cried Sturrie, in reply to the offer of Conrade, whom he had known in England.

“ Behold !” grimly replied Stetten, raising the yet wet blade of his axe ; “ in this base blood may you read a voucher for the good faith of

Conrade Stetten. There shall be no further harm done to any here, Sir William Sturrie, and further resistance, being hopeless, is no longer needful to the honour of a brave man."

"We yield your prisoners then, since needs must, but full dearly will Flanders hereafter have to bide this outrage," said the Knight, rendering his sword, the handle of which having courteously touched with his glove, Conrade bade the owner to resume, saying, in answer—

"We, Flemings, are free men, Sir William, and may well seek to right our own grievances, without exciting or dreading England's anger."

The latter sentence was received with loud approbation by the bold citizens, who now crowded into the dead lion's den, gaping with stupid awe and wonderment about on every side, and marvelling where were hidden those profane luxuries, and all that treasure, of which they had been told such golden tales; not stumbling over these as they had anticipated, in a short time each man began to ask his fel-

low what they were now to gain by this great stir.

The influential and wealthier burgesses, few of whom had shewn forth in the hours of strife and tumult, but, during the reign of danger, had, according to the wont of all such worshipful personages, kept close at home, leaving the commonweath to fortune, now began slowly to shew out, and make loud talk of stirring for the people's satisfaction.

The vast hall, or halls, as they may more properly be termed, of the Hotel d'Artevelde, presented, in a few minutes after this surrender, a curious subject for the pencil of the artist, filled as the space was with unseemly groups of ill-clad rabble from the *faubourgs*, searching about with hungry looks for prey, and eyeing half-savagely, half-fearfully, their late opponents of Artevelde's guard, who banded now together, were formed with their long partizans in their hands, a little way in front of the cattle of their allies, which were arranged orderly enough against the wall to the left of the

front entrance, at present, widely thrown open to give free passage through the house. About these horses, some score of which had been ridden safely in from out of the first *mêlée* before the Hotel, were now busily moving such of their hardy owners as yet remained alive or fit for service ; these soldiers were actively employed in serving their beasts with water, and, as well as might be, administering to their other wants during this cessation from blows, the probable duration of which they neither sought to learn nor cared for, but moved about the space they had thus appropriated to their use, with as much *sang froid* as if there was nothing singular in their new stable, or dangerous in such close approximation with their late besiegers, who passed along in continuous streams from front to rear, casting on the strangers thus fellowed with the unpopular guard of the Ruward, looks full of menace and dislike.

In the opposite angle of this front hall were several huge tables, hastily thrust aside ; some

of these being overthrown, had strewn the marble floor with their contents ; others were yet standing, partially covered with the remnants of the medley of viands which in rough abundance had been supplied to the hungry defenders of the house, though with little regard to the decent order usually in attendance at the Ruward's board ; amongst this wreck, too, as being furthest removed from out the press, here and there were disposed such of the wounded as claimed serious attention ; some of these seated on or leaning against the banquettes scattered about, continued with careless and languid looks to watch the crowd flowing along before them ; whilst others kneeling by the side of some more sorely hurt brother-in-arms, were busied in binding up his wounds, or otherwise attending to his wants.

Seated upon the great stairs, or lounging over the balustrade of the circular gallery above, and thence scanning with frequent laughter the passers-by beneath, the wilder spirits of the English escort were congregated, and over this railing, too, might now and then

be caught a glimpse of some pretty female faces, as, impelled by curiosity, the domestics, half recovered from the fright, stole out from their hiding-places to venture in concert a timid survey of the disorder and defilement filling their so recently well-arranged domicile.

The interval for reflection allowed during the first hurry of the people's triumphant entry into their late master's habitation, sufficed to make evident to Philip the folly, not to say inhumanity, of any attempt to revive, for the gratification of his personal revenge, a contest so unequal, and which could only end in the murder of the faithful few who remained with them; calming, therefore, his feelings to meet the occasion, Courtressin, as we shall still call him, stepped once more forth into the hall, and, after formally rendering himself prisoner to Stetten, next appealed to the authorities assembling to permit of the removal of the corse of the Ruward.

This was freely accomplished, for there were none to oppose the pious act; from the time of his fall not an irreverent finger had, by the

vilest of the populace, been laid upon his mangled remains, and the present busy scene became deserted, when consigned to the care of the Superior of St. Augustine's, the body of Jacob Van Artevelde was, by the brethren of that house, removed to their convent, followed by thousands yet hardly awakened from the stupor occasioned by his sudden death.

The magistrates, on their parts, although perchance, in reality, little grieved at this removal of one who brooked no divided rule in Ghent, were yet greatly alarmed at the thought of there having been put such a sore affront upon the King of England, whose good-will they were most anxious to retain, the commerce of the country he governed being so essential to their best interests. After, therefore, seeing some shew of order established amongst the people, they next began to reflect how best to lighten their offence in the eyes of Edward ; and, to this end, sought, first, to arrange a safe return for the late Ruward's faithful escort, and the Knights commanders. Fi-

nally, it was settled amongst these politic worthies, that after midnight, when the wearied people were at rest, those left here should be, with Maltravers, led without the walls to join their companions, and so march in company, by way of Bruges, back upon Sluys; whilst, in the meantime, Sir William Sturrie should immediately set out for that place, in order to make known to his master the evil end of his lover Artevelde, as well as to express the great sorrow felt by the Ghent deputies for this sad result of the tumult, of which they protested, one and all, their innocence.

In these points the party of Lewis found it expedient to give way, and, indeed, were no way sorry to be well rid of even this small body of men and their grim chieftain, having been by their valour taught to hold them in greater respect than a first view of their numbers might have claimed; but, although this party was the least numerous, its activity and singleness of purpose rendered it in this mo-

ment the most effective ; its leaders also were known to be in possession of the popular ear, and consequently not to be provoked with safety ; when, therefore, Conrade Stetten claimed young Courtressin for *his* prisoner, and declared his intention of taking him along to Rerefonde, although many saw peril in thus throwing the youth into the hands of a cousin-considered not over scrupulous in the selection of means where his power or wealth might be advanced, yet few openly objected to the demand.

Maltravers being ignorant of the relationship the heir of Courtressin bore to Rerefonde, was only apprehensive, lest, whilst he remained here, Philip's true birth might be revealed to his father's foes, and, consequently, saw safety in his instant removal from this dangerous scene, merely viewing Conrade's claim as a matter of ransom : as for the person most interested in this matter, he heard of the proposal with, truth to say, despite the late events—a feeling almost akin to joy ; he had a deeply heart-ed interest in visiting the walls of Rerefonde,

which rendered his nearer approach to them by any means, or in any character, a welcome event.

Conrade was most anxious forthwith to return, first, for the purpose of making known the state of affairs to his Lord upon his landing, and, next, in the event of his prolonged arrival, to prepare for the prompt abandonment of a hold, which, he shrewdly surmised, would be, although in the country of an ally, no longer secure once Edward became informed of its owner's share in the present outbreak.

Two hours after this time then beheld the stout esquire on his march homeward, followed by the survivors of his troop, and with his handsome captive riding by his side, who, on his part, buoyed up with the levity natural to his character and untamed spirits, was already less filled with melancholy reflections on the past, than occupied with golden anticipations for the future, which seemed, as it were, about to rise brightly out of this now dark adventure.

CHAPTER IV.

It here becomes necessary for the full developement of events, to cast a somewhat retrospective glance within the walls of the castle of Rerefonde, where, since the arrival of Father Mathieu, and the *avant* party landed from the Free Maiden, there were gentle hearts that beat thick with anxiety, and bright eyes made dim with watching.

For the ladye of the castle had been taught to look for the speedy coming of her truant lord ; the wind too had heard her prayer, and ever since blew steadily towards his home :

yet vainly did she watch the dull unwooded flat, lying between this and the sea, scarce two miles distant, and when darkness had shrouded the road from her view, counted each wave that broke upon the hollow beach ; even when laid on her late sought couch she often waked again to hearken anxiously to the surf's dull roar, until worn nature tuned it to a lullaby, and the gentle watcher restlessly slumbered to the hoarse sound.

When on an early hour of morning the young Alzire caught, whilst watching in her mother's absence, the twinkling of the sunbeams as they came dancing on, reflected from the lance points of an approaching troop of armed men, the maiden looked not closer, but flew a joyful herald of her father's coming.

Lightly ascending the high watch tower, the ladye marked their order, nor turned her eyes away until each particular form in the compact mass, moving slowly on, might be singled out and clearly recognized ; then, looking sadly on her child—

“No, Alzire, deceiver,” she cried, “it is not Sir Alaine!—I see him not, nor mark the flutter of Rerefonde’s banner—hold, hoist not yet, good fellow,” she added, mournfully, to the soldier, who, on the battlement of the projecting turret above, stood ready to give the broad flag to the wind, which should tell to the vassals of Rerefonde, that their lord was landed—“hold thy hand, for thy master rides not with yonder clump of spears. O, no! wanderer as he is, well do I know Sir Alaine moves not forward so tortoise like, when once come within the shadow of his own home!”

“It is not my father, and I have then called you hither in vain!” whispered Alzire, tenderly passing both her arms round the little waist of her young parent.

“The mother of our Christian prophet give more cunning to those bright eyes of thine, Alzire, and slower motion to thy false flattering tongue thou dull watcher, who hast made me heart sick with a promise of present fulfil-

ment of the hope so over long delayed," answered, in a playfully reproachful tone, the ladye, kissing the eyes of her she thus chided.

"I could only see the glisten of the steel heads of those tall shafts, which, seeming to rise as it were from out the sea I watched not further, thinking none other could come from thence before my father."

"Nor should there have been other herald of his coming, were he but as certain even as this wind that blows against our faces; but it is like enough he hath turned about his prow with the first tide, and now sends home these lazy riders, to warn me of his altered purpose; but come, my Alzire, let us descend, and from these soldiers hear of him at least."

By the time these fair watchers had descended, Conrade Stetten was, at the head of the newly landed troop, filing in soldierly order over the inner drawbridge; and on entering within the hall, the hollow ring of the

chargers' hoofs struck heavily upon the ear of the disappointed and apprehensive wife of Rerefonde.

As she was desiring one of the domestics to send Conrade to her, the esquire in person stepped within the door. "Where is your master?" was her quick demand, as her eye recognised the person of the comer.

"He is upon the seas," was the laconic reply of Conrade, bowing low as he spoke.

"That is no answer to my question," impatiently interrupted the ladye, "and well thou knowest this. Upon the seas!—why, man, the seas flow as far as earth's remotest limit, and he may be upon the seas, yet distant from us as that watery cave in which the tired sun takes his nightly rest; but comes he hitherward upon the seas? is he near this land?"

"There is but the distance of one tide's run between us, ladye, if his bark but swims on as nimble a keel as those that bore us hither."

“Of that there is no doubt, since my lord would hardly choose the slowest conveyance for himself the word being—home! And now art thou welcome, brave Conrade,” she added, in a kind tone, presenting her hand to the esquire; “the welcomer for thy news, although thou didst not for certain breathe thy good horse in the bringing of it.”

“In truth, ladye, horses are rarely the brisker for a passage over sea, however short or fair—and ours has been both, Saint Martin be praised!—moreover, at present, the cattle need to be tenderly dealt by, since ’tis like they will have hard pressing enough, ere long.”

“Woe! woe!” exclaimed the ladye, at these ominous words, “I have guessed so much, by this gradual in-gathering of armed men; who, like vultures, flock not together, save when a prey is seen, or scented to be near; but thou art welcome, Conrade; and now let, I pray, a light-footed horse be posted by the banks, to bring me word when Sir Alaine’s

mast is indeed near, that I may not again be surprised or disappointed.

Upon the departure from the hall of the Ladye of Rerefonde and her daughter, Conrade was immediately hailed by the jovial Father Mathicu, and, after the manner of that worthy, made aware of the nice crisis of present affairs—of the near neighbourhood of the English King, of the absence of Artevelde from Ghent, and of the many messengers who had lately arrived from Denise and the malcontents there, stating that they waited only for Sir Alaine's presence, and that he with them, they would strike for Lewis, without abiding longer the coming of Barberoux, or the promised help from France.

Thus spurred on, that same night the indefatigable Stetten quitted Rerefonde, at the head of twenty men-at-arms, completely harnessed. The three following days led to the murder of the Ruward, as we have already shewn, the afternoon of this last saddest day witnessed

the landing of Sir Alaine, and made him master of the many stirring rumours, and rapidly, indeed, did he make homeward, as he learned how absolute was the present call for speed.

Crossing the moat, he checked his horse, and flung himself from the saddle by the gate ; for, standing there to greet him, were two female forms, more lovely than those described by the arch-prophet, as waiting to welcome the faithful into paradise.

In that moment of meeting, the cold, proud features of the Knight became animated with a smile of pleasure. His eye sparkled with a father's pride, as it lighted upon the faultless beauty of his child, Alzire, and in his face at least sat tenderness, as he passed his arms round the fragile form of that child's mother. But brief were their words of welcome, and few the moments devoted to this meeting of the long and often parted.

Attending his ladye to the apartments within which she lived in almost total seclusion

during the periods of his absence, Sir Alain there left her, and buckled with ardour to the task of scanning the mad news, which every hour increased in interest. He found all however giving a fair promise to his hopes ; and cursing the lazy preparations which had held him back some day or two, immediately sent d'Aurai on to assure the Gantois in the interest of Lewes, of his quick coming, at the same time giving orders that every man should hold himself prepared that night to move forward.

“ In reason, Count Alain, you are right in this haste,” quietly observed Father Mathieu, as he turned aside with the Knight, after being witness to these orders, “ I love the air of this place, and the old wine in the cellar, the fresh meats in the buttery, and the fresh fish of the sea close by—verily, no where am I more at ease than at Rerfonde ; yet notwithstanding do I say, go thou, let us go—we are over-near the lion’s den, to abide in this cover

safely, after your share in this rising of the Gantois is bruited abroad; for when it once reaches Sluys——”

“Would,” interrupted the Knight, flinging himself on one of the banquettes arranged along the wall, “would they had held off their hands but for one day longer; for, by that time, I doubt not Barberoux will be in sight; with Croquart’s lances to back our loyal burghers, we might have laughed at the friends of the arch-traitor, within the walls of Ghent, and have braved all the force England can here muster without them—but you say wisely, Father, go the game now as it will, nought remains for us but, *Forward!*”

“Poor Rainer!” and the Father lifted his eyes, and sighed like a pavior, as he made meek mention of the name of his old trencher-mate, “he hath made but evil handling of the prize he caught that time we sailed in company—that is, an all be true we gather from Sluys.”

“ I have already heard all,” exclaimed Sir Alaine, springing upon his feet, his brow darkling as he spoke ; “ name not the matter more, else it will drive me wild ; fool that a blind fortune made me—to think too this mad Sir King should come so well off out of so brainless a venture. I heard without marvel, that Edward was bone-sore and bed-ridden on the day after that cursed tourney, but only when all came openly out had sense enough to guess at the great prize I had let slip ; but this is idle now—we are still well seated to win our play, and—but, hark !”

It was the loud voice of the warder on duty proclaiming the approach of a friend, and challenging the postern gate to be ready to lower.

“ News from Ghent,” exclaimed the Knight, striding hastily to the door, hence catching the figure of a horseman slowly emerging out of the deep sunk archway leading from the narrow postern, he hastily demanded—“ Now, Wilhelm, what tidings have so sharpened thy

spurs, since I see the sides of thy good grey are dappled red?"

"Rare tidings as ever wrung horse's wither, or won princely largess—Artevelde is slain since morn!—what for so much?"

"This," cried the Knight, flinging a purse into the open hand of the blunt courier, "and I'll give thee its fellow, if thy next answer pleases—goes all well for Lewis?"

"Why, to be honest, my Lord, of this I know over little, to win the money fairly—all was so confused when I made out from Ghent—our party were then uppermost, but seemed sunk in mettle by the manner of the Brewer's death, and stood herding back one on the other, like sheep that looked on a slain wolf."

"It was a pity to slay him," muttered the Knight, "it would have served a better purpose to have held him a caged prisoner, for a while, than dispatching him so suddenly."

"And it was at this Conrade aimed, and so told us all," replied the fellow; "but he was struck with the knife, while under our war-

ranty, by that revengeful knave Deacon—him of the weavers' guild."

"Denise?" cried the Knight, "brainless idiot!"

"That is he, now, by my soul," shouted the soldier, with a hoarse laugh, "for Conrade scattered the brains of the lout with his axe-edge, and left his weaver skull as empty as my pocket was a minute back."

"Conrade slew Denise after, mean you?"

"Even so, my Lord. Artevelde, you must know, came, on Stetten's word, down from the roost where we set him, when this mad Deacon struck him foully under the very hand of Conrade; which hand, as I tell you, fell over-heavy on the lout's sconce, in quittance of that stroke."

Here the cry of the warder was again heard directing the postern bridge to be lowered, and Sir Alaine, smothering his vexation, impatiently turned away from the last speaker, to question this new messenger. It was d'Aurai who returned thus soon, to inform his master

of Conrade's approach, which he had gathered from a foundered courier, some few leagues off, together with the yet stranger tidings that, in his company the Scigneur of Courtressin rode prisoner.

This was an event most joyful indeed to the hearing of the Knight, whose all stood perilled on the present venture ; one object of his policy at least, he might now hope soon to accomplish, and be the less embarrassed for the general result, since, if he succeeded in this aim, his after-course would be single. Giving orders to be apprized of Conrade's arrival, at whatever hour it might occur, the Knight left the court-yard, in company with Father Mathieu, through whose arm passing his hand, he whispered in that under key which bespoke him always most intent of purpose.

“ Now, Father, comes the very hour to prove our information as to the love fooling of this pretty pair through the grate of our Ladye ; any way do thou seek out a breviary, and con over thy lesson ; for, by my soul I

vow, this boy shall have either a sudden wedding, or a short thrift; and we have played so much of our game ill, an he choose not the wiser."

They were by this time arrived before the door of the ladye's apartments. Mathieu answered not; but his huge sides shook, as, smothering an inward chuckle, he nodded, and passed on, whilst Sir Alaine, with a smooth brow, entered the chamber.

In what terms this intelligence of the guest expected, was, within that chamber's privacy, made known to the Dame of Rerefonde and her fair Alzire, has never been learned; But judging from effects merely, the news could not have been broken in a way otherwise than agreeable to both; for, soon after, there was a loud note of preparation sounded here, and henceforward there might be observed a continued stir amongst those important personages, the ladye's tire-women; and, in truth, this bustle of adornment was not confined to the principals, but, in due course, descended to the damsels of every degree.

The ruler of the kitchen, too, had his interview with Sir Alaine—a rare event—and passed back into his domain with a more lordly air; the spirit of the hour quickly pervaded each department in the vast household, as it became known that at the supper of this night, the Count and Countess, attended by the lovely Alzire, would, in their own persons, preside.

The hall was hastily strewn with fresh-cut rushes, the tables were laid for an assemblage of all the military retainers of Rerefonde, and this not after the ordinary fashion, but as for an occasion of great state; the dais was, for the first time since Sir Alaine's return from Spain, canopied, and set richly forth, as was befitting the presence of high-born dames; whilst amidst all this, the savoury vapours which subtilly stole hitherward from the distant kitchens, caused sundry hasty pauses and upliftings of both the eyes and the wide-spread nostrils of the holy Father Mathieu, as, with his arms behind him, he soberly paced the hall, diligently watching, and, in truth, presiding

over the arrangements of the bustling servants.

So passed the time until nigh midnight, when the blast of a distant horn warned the centinel on the barbican, of the approach of the expected party. Nor was it without a quickening of the pulse that Philip de Cour-tressin heard the quick reply given from the trumpet of the watchful warder there.

Conrade directed his approach towards the postern, as being the sole entrance permitted by the jealous precaution of the times after night-fall, and whose narrow bridge was only accessible by one horse at a time ; but to his surprise, on challenging this, he received instructions to return and enter over the great drawbridge.

“ What’s afoot now ? ” murmured the worn-out esquire inwardly, as he gave the command, to wheel about ; and his wonder was not diminished when, on arriving opposite the great entrance, the heavy portcullis being wholly raised, he beheld standing within the gateway the Count

in person, circled by the principal of his retainers, and flanked on either side by a swarm of torch-bearers, who, as the drawbridge fell, advanced in a double line, making this, together with the deep arch of the barbican, one blaze of light.

As Conrade rode on to the bridge, with the no less amazed Courtressin by his side, Sir Alaine stepped forward, crying aloud in the frankest and most cheerful manner.

“Welcome, thrice welcome to our noble cousin of Courtressin, over-long a stranger within the walls of one who, both from near kindred, and out of the gratitude I owe to Sir Bertrand, ought to be better known to his son.”

As Philip alighted, an officious soldier suddenly caught at the rein of his horse which but uneasily faced the near lights, when the startled beast wheeling about dashed back over the bridge, closely followed by the active fellow who was observed to keep his hold on the animal's rein until they both were lost in the gloom without.

The interruption was momentary. "Look to that horse," cried Sir Alaine; and taking the hand of his young kinsman, he turned towards the great hall, preceded by the torchbearers, and followed by a crowd of hardy-looking retainers gaily equipped for the banquet.

"Who was he that stuck so hardily and ran so lightly by the head of that shy brute, Wilhelm?" demanded the warder of a man-at-arms left near him—the rest of the party having filed beneath the archway—"for I may not keep gate up, and bridge down all night, since he appears not to be coming hastily back."

"'Twas that brisk knave, Gilbert the Saxon," replied Wilhelm. "The fellow hath both the foot and the wind of a deer-hound; he'll recover the beast, I warrant, even if he lost his hold on the rein, which I fancy he must ha' done, else he'd ha' been back by this time."

"Do you then, as you pass, bid them to let him in by the postern there, for I'll wait no

longer ; so heave up and lower away briskly, bullies."

The groaning of the laden windlasses told that the command of the warder had been heard above, and soon after this sound had ceased, the "All's well!" of the centinels again spoke present security for the garrison.

Meantime, in his most courtly fashion, and with many honied words, our host conducted his captive guest towards the great hall, within the entrance of which Philip, with doubting eyes beheld the crowning wonder of this night of surprises ; for standing there was the fair boarder of our Ladye de Damme, the secretly-worshipped idol of his heart, decked in her most witching garb, rosy with blushes, and dimpled with the hardly suppressed smiles of such delight as young maidens feel at the sudden coming of one who has found favour in their sight. Near to Alzire stood her mother, whose large dark eyes were rivetted with an air of anxious interest upon the approaching stranger's face, and, judging by the softened

expression they gradually assumed, were not shocked by the traits presented therein.

“ I bring you hither a gallant prisoner, Countess,” cried Sir Alaine, presenting his cousin, and trust you will contrive to render his captivity so lightsome to him that it will be long ere he speaks of ransom. Here, Alzire,” he added, turning to his daughter, “ is your young kinsman of Courtressin, whom, if I remember rightly, I have heard you say you some time beheld a visitor at your convent.”

The youth and maiden bowed and looked, and looked again, but the tongues of neither moved in present answer ; the Countess next presenting her hand to Philip, said—

“ The kinsman of my lord is welcome to Rerefonde, and we hope the evil days are for ever passed away which held at such cold distance those who both by nature and reason should be as one.”

“ And I surely ought no less to hope this,” replied Philip, surmounting his first embar-

rassment ; “ for I have, as I now plainly see, been the shrewdest loser by this evil estrangement.”

“ All will be well soon, we doubt not,” here cried Alaine, who had looked closely on, a pleased witness of this brief scene ; and this said, taking his ladye’s hand, he led the way up the long hall followed by Philip and Alzire ; together, too, these took their places at the dais, and in the intoxication of this moment, the light-hearted boy soon forgot the heavy opening of the day which to his eyes was closing so serenely.

And at this gay board passed many a joyful whisper, though of light import, between the happy captive and her whose smile would have made worse thralldom light to bear ; and whilst they sat together, time fled away unmarked by either, but when the maiden, at her mother’s rising, left the glittering scene, the eye of Philip waxed dim, his tongue became quickly mute, and the remembrance of the morning and of him who now lay wrapped

in a bloody shroud within the cold chapel of St. Augustine's, rose once more vivid and fresh before him : after vainly, for a while, striving to cast off this oppressive gloom, he prayed Sir Alaine to permit him also to retire ; the courteous Knight rose with the word, and accompanying his guest within his chamber, with often-repeated welcomes, there left him to his repose.

Sir Alaine himself returned not to that scene of revel, which, thus loosed from all restraint, soon waxed more noisily joyous ; but seeking the quiet of his own room thence sent, in a short time after, a summons for the presence of Father Mathieu, who, hearkening with an unwilling ear to this ill-timed message, did not make his appearance until after the second call, and then approached with a lour upon his countenance which called for but small skill in physiognomy to interpret.

“ Why, how now, old sinner,” cried Sir Alaine, in a laughing mood, as Mathieu was

slowly stalking across the floor of the room, "thou comest as unwillingly hither as crawls an ancient turnspit into a kitchen before noon."

"Ay, or as a horse from a full manger, or as a fish from clear water," sulkily growled the burly priest; "if you come to comparisons, Sir Alaine, I'll supply you with a string as long as my bead-roll, and all as right to the purpose."

"But, in the name of patience, what ill spirit warps thy humour now, Sir Priest?" laughingly enquired the Knight, amused by the lugubrious look and vexed speech of the Father.

"Half bated hunger and unslaked thirst! I've fasted late, eaten little, and drunk none; so, of the saints' mercy, Sir Alaine, let me have mine errand, and briefly, that I may depart and, ere the board be cleared, satisfy the natural cravings which I, in common with my fellow-sinners, have, and the which do ordinarily mortify the flesh sufficiently, heaven

be witness, without the addition of this unthought-for penance."

"Why, thou art grown into an intolerable glutton of late, and art become a mere waste cask for drink," said the Knight, with a manner half-serious, half-bantering, "and were it not out of old remembrances and foolish habit I would hound thee from me, Mathieu, to do yet harder penance within thy convent, and not longer suffer thy example to uphold these riots wherever thou settest foot."

"Hadst thou so hounded me some twenty years back it would have been lighter for soul and body of mine, for both have become heavily laden in following thy fortunes, Alaine de Rerefonde; but now, methinks, 'tis somewhat of the latest to talk of *hounding*." The Priest uttered this in a voice intended to be reproachful, accompanying his words with a most whimsical attempt at looking indignant.

"Ha, ha, ha! thou sayest true, Mathieu," exclaimed Rerefonde, with an air of freedom he shewed towards none other, "so give me

thy ready hand; we have run our changeeful course in company, each in his degree, even since from this very ground we sallied forth so full of hope into the bustling world; and, I swear, together will we see the end."

"Amen! and far distant be that day of rest for the weary," cried Mathieu, with a sanctified leer.

"And now," continued Sir Alaine, "I desire not long to hold thee; but thou seest this boy is fairly caught? to-morrow then I seek to make all sure, since our time is brief. It were not difficult, perchance, to win him to range with us here, but that it is better as it is, since, as he now stands, come what will, Alzire and her mother at least are safe; for if Lewis gain he will bear lightly on Courtressin for my daughter's sake, and if Edward triumph he must be grateful to the ward of his late lover and ally—seest thou this?"

"'Tis shrewdly cared for," replied the Priest.

Sir Alaine went on—

"And now, where, I prythee, is that spare

clothworker? the fool who thrust his head before my iron glove in that cursed pest-hole by the Thames—him you brought a prisoner here in the *Free Maiden*?”

“He is well lodged in the Boor tower over the south postern,” answered Mathieu, “with a whole head and a keen appetite as any man in Zealand—ha, ha! I knew the old burgher that moment I set eyes upon him, for many a kind turn had he done to me when I was a boy, an innocent chorister at St. Anne’s Chapel; in remembrance of the which I have, ever since his coming hither, administered to his carnal wants, and truly good living is not thrown away upon Master Van Heylen, for he hath a just notion of delicate fare, and as true a palate for right wine as——”

“Well, well,” impatiently broke in the Knight, “I’m glad to hear ye are such gossips, for it may the readier serve our turn; so send for this trencher-mate of thine, and after what fashion thou wilt, win from him the nature and extent of the compact so

unwisely made by my cousin, Sir Bertram, with the false Brewer ; doubtless this old fox knows all, and some way or other we must extract the truth from him."

Summoning a domestic, Sir Alaine here despatched the man with an order to the warder to produce his prisoner, Van Heylen : whilst this errand was in progress, Mathieu's impatience was appeased by the appearance of a full beaker of veritable dry muscat, and henceforward, with a smooth brow, he awaited the arrival of the prisoner, nor wearied whilst listening, with moistened lips, to his lord's more particular detail of all he purposed.

It was not until after a period unnecessarily prolonged that the messenger returned accompanied by the warder, who, in great trepidation, told how, upon seeking to conduct his charge hitherward, he had discovered that his chamber was untenanted, and the prisoner flown, without, as it appeared, the slightest clue being left to point out the mode of his escape.

“Fool!” cried Sir Alaine, “who was last on guard over his chamber?”

“An Englishman named Gilbert, who came hither with the Father,” answered the warder.

“What!” cried Mathieu, “Saxon Gilbert? ’tis a sharp witted and bold knave—he was taken from on board that galley you wot of, Sir Alaine, and after offered to serve under your banner.”

“’Twas a simple trust surely to put on one so long known,” cried the vexed Knight, “but where is this fellow? seek him out, and I will question him.”

After some further hesitation, Sir Alaine was informed that this man had already been vainly sought for, that he was in fact the same who had so lightly followed the restive horse of the young Count Philip, the which it was presumed he had not yet caught, since he was not up to this hour returned to the castle.

“They are doubtless fled together by the way to Sluys,” said Sir Alaine, after the first burst of his anger was past; “the old fox will

make right for his own cover. Send out half a score riders on the spur—bid them bring Van Heylen unharmed, but for this shrewd witted Saxon, let him be hung up by the wayside, to point out to his brethren the road to Rere-fonde, which some of them are like enough to seek ere long.”

In a short time after Father Mathieu was once more seated in his accustomed place, at the board in the hall, and close by his side stood the beaker of rare muscat, the late disappointment prevented his having time entirely to discuss. The horsemen were also passed outward, bitterly cursing both Gilbert and Van Heylen, whilst Sir Alaine sought his bed, but did not readily find repose there, for full many a plan for a long future on this night filled his wily politic brain.

And there were other eyes kept long unclosed this night within these walls, through fancies of a gentler kind 'tis true, but no less foes to sleep.

“And this then is him of Courtressin?” said

the Countess, as the blushing Alzire, once safely hidden from observation, flung herself upon her mother's bosom and wept she knew not wherefore, unless for very joy—"this is the gay young falconer, with slender form and ivory brow, and jetty locks, of whom I have oft heard such gentle mention. In truth," she archly added, "thou art no ill limner, Alzire, allowing for the convent grate between, and he but thrice seen too."

Few and short were the answers of that young maiden to her mother's seemingly sportive, but in reality most anxious prattle upon this near subject; but although she had breathed no word of reply, her eyes were yet too innocent, too untutored to play the mirrors falsely to her heart, and therein clearly imaged, the watchful mother found it no hard task to read the fact she sought—that fact was *love*!

CHAPTER V.

MEANTIME there arrived at Sluys fresh tidings of Derby's success in France, and increased gaiety prevailed in consequence at the court of the English King, where, in the midst of the inactivity in which they were unwillingly detained, many a wild vow was daily made by the young nobles and esquires, binding themselves to redeem these lost hours, by doing deeds of prowess, whose fame should even go before the widely rumoured feats of their brethren in arms, now with the noble Derby in the south; for that the door would soon be open, on this

side into France was no longer a doubtful matter, since each day brought news of the triumphs obtained by Artevelde in the Prince's name, wherever he had as yet made open appeal to the people; and although the Ruward's last dispatch from Ypres told how he was hurrying to get on his way to Ghent, in order to check in person the machinations of the evil minded agents of Lewes, ever busy in his absence, yet small apprehensions appeared to attend even this drawback to the general joy.

It was, however, felt by all conversant with the country, that this movement must at once lead to the decisive blow, as Ghent once agreed to the transfer of the sovereignty, the result in the remaining towns would be certain; most men, indeed, in accordance with the King's desires, expressed themselves confident of the wished-for result—arguing, that if Artevelde could so suddenly succeed in Bruges and Ypres, places wherein he was comparatively a stranger, the popularity and love borne to him in Ghent

—the seat of his great power—could not fail to bear down any opposition the intrigues of Lewis might have conjured up in his absence.

On the other hand were to be found a few amongst the Flemish seigneurs who shook their heads, and wished the Ruward had been quicker in his return home, since it was notorious there were many wild and discontented spirits stirring throughout the land, raising a cry of pity for the banished Prince and “*lez avolez*,” who lived, as it was said, aliens from their country, not for any public good, but that their revenues might be swept into the Ruward's countless hoards.

Edward saw, therefore, that there was at least a chance of the struggle being, for a time, more protracted than he had hoped, and straightway, on the first receipt of the ill-news from Ypres, dispatched back to England Prince Edward and most of the courtly throng who had attended him here, to be present at the ceremony of his investment with the title and honours of Duke of Flanders—keeping

only such men at-arms and gentlemen as were likely to be needed, should any sudden emergency arise. This movement gave fresh tongue to fame, and each man's mind was set upon the stretch to win some confirmation of the good or evil rumours afloat, according to their several views and dispositions.

First came a well arranged talc̃ how the Ruward had come by surprise upon the plotters in Ghent, and, with the help of the English lances, restored quiet and enforced his shaken authority. Next, in support of this good news, word was brought from the way of Bruges, that he had entered the city in triumph, at once convincing the people of the wisdom and honesty of his intended change, and winning to his wish the hearts and hands of all that heard him.

For many hours did this rumour prevail, and great was the seemipg joy with which it loudly passed from lip to lip, although no man could trace the source of its first rise ; towards the same evening, however, and whilst

its round was hardly yet completely run, there gradually arose a counter gale, which barely checking at first the onward flow of this bright current, next mingled rudely with its waters, till, with increasing strength, it fairly rolled them back, spreading dark mists over the so lately brilliant atmosphere of the court—whilst in this time, men might be seen banded together in their several degrees at every corner, with eager looks exchanging, in hollow whispers, the various versions of this air-borne intelligence of ill, for such it seemed to be, since no man might be found who openly dared to avouch that so widely trumpeted about, or say that it was true.

Amidst all these changes, which so wrought upon the multitude, how painful were the days of suspense to the adopted daughter of Artevelde? Shutting herself within the mansion of the sister of Van Heylen, she tremblingly awaited the crisis she had been fully prepared to consider was at hand, and strong was her presentiment of evil. She joined not in

the courtly plays and festivities enacted on the Ruward's first departure, and was but rarely known to be seen, save by James Audeley, who daily bore to the fair maiden the enquiries of his royal master, the which, as by duty and courtesy prompted, she ever received in person : many a young bachelor here envied Audeley this duty, and he, truth to tell, made the most of it, having ever some fresh tidings wherewith to win the attention of the anxious Bertha.

But, alas for poor Lord James, his tidings were only the stale repetition of that already learned by heart from other lips, since there was one through whom he so industriously collected all the passing gossip, who had invariably reported it, word for word, before imparting a syllable to him.

From the lips of Leonard it was that Audeley gleaned each night such news of the state of the near towns, as he had at an earlier hour already made known to his secretly adored mistress, the which the King's messenger each following

morning again as regularly recapitulated with a precision that proved the goodness of his memory, if it argued little in favour of his powers of imagination: and so were both these young men made for the time happy, Leonard having this ready access, could hardly fail, despite the diffidence of true love, to perceive that he was creating an interest in the breast of the woman to whom he had vowed his existence, whilst Audeley was yet more satisfied that, being so often seen, he was as surely seen to the advancement of a suit on which, although he had not as yet fully decided, it in truth needed but a feather weight to set him seriously in pursuit.

Twice on the evening of this last heavy rumour already hinted at, did the mindful monarch, in the midst of his own cares, send messages of comfort to her whose protector he had pledged himself to be, assuring her that they had every thing to hope, since, as yet, no word of evil was truly known to any; and so passed away this night.

Before daybreak Leonard, having previously obtained the king's permission, mounted on Soldan, and passing the gates of the town, pressed forward on the Bruges road, resolute not to turn back until he had gained some certain intelligence from Ghent ; heavy rain, which had already lasted some hours, continued to deluge the flat country, rendering the road all but impassable to a less ardent courier, or a worse horse, and having passed the tower of St. Anne's, he was just entering into the deeply-shaded road beyond, when a loud challenge from some one at no great distance in advance caused him to halt ; when he replied to the " Who comes there ? " of the challenger by a repetition of the words.

" A friend, as I should guess an your tongue may be trusted, and a sore wearied knight of England," replied the first querist, advancing as he spoke near enough to enable Leonard, by the little light gleaming through the tall alders, to perceive a fully armed man painfully labouring on foot to make his way through the thick mud.

A word now made them known to each other, and in the way-worn cavalier Leonard discovered Sir William Sturrie, Maltravers's second in command.

"I augur but heavy news from this encounter, Sir William," said Leonard enquiringly, after the first greeting had made them acquainted.

"Ask not of news," replied the Knight. "The devils of hell are abroad, and in striving to outride them, I've killed my best destrier in this cursed swamp."

"Your horse has then foundered under you here?"

"Foundered ! fell dead I tell you, man, after our coming down thrice before in company : he lies about a long mile in the rear, and is wolf's meat by this, I warrant. The fiends seize the country, the roads, and the makers of them, I say !"

"And now what help may I offer you, Sir William, since my errand, having met you, is over, and myself and horse at your service?"

"As for help, young esquire," answered the

Knight, running his hand over the flank of Leonard's horse, "if this well-bellied beast will carry double, and your orders hold you not from wheeling about, in God's name take me, *en croupe*, and pryck backward to where the King lies."

"Place your foot on mine then, and up, Sir William," cried Leonard. "I'll answer for my horse so you heed not a rough seat; and would to the saints he were heavier laden with lighter tidings!"

From the Knight, as they thus rode back the mile lying between their place of meeting and the gates of Sluys, Leonard gathered the particulars of the sad ending of the King's friend, as already rehearsed; then, first placing his companion by the side of the Catherine, where the King continued to abide, he next hastily sought, as he had promised, the house of Van Heylen; and although he shuddered to be the herald of an event so terrible, he yet inwardly hoped that by his tongue, less abruptly than by that of any other, it might be told.

Early as was still the hour, his coming was immediately hailed by the presence of both the eager females, to whom his downcast look afforded too certain intelligence of ill, before his lips had recovered the power of motion.

“He has fallen!” exclaimed Bertha, looking stedfastly into the eyes of her messenger, and overmastering all utterance of her grief—“My protector, my kinsman, has fallen at length, even as he never ceased to predict, a sacrifice to the ungrateful people for whose weal he laboured—the dreadful whispers of yesterday need not stronger confirmation than your present looks—speak! you come to tell me that he has fallen?”

“I come indeed a woeful newsbearer,” said Leonard, “and have ridden forth so early this morning but to return, a thing of evil omen in your eyes. I went forth at least accompanied by hope; I come back bearing despair alone—but hate me not, I implore you, ladye, for my hard fortune.”

The tears of the maiden at length forced a way, and choaked her eager questions ; whilst the aged woman wrung her hands, bitterly cursing aloud the murderers of the Ruward, with whom she failed not to class those who slew her brother ; continuing to rail against both with a bitterness and volubility that might have raised a smile from an indifferent looker-on, until a loud knocking on the hall door, near which she paced, so startled her already shattered nerves, that she fairly screamed forth the names of the several domestics, who quickly ran in with bewildered looks, whilst in the pauses of this alarm came from those waiting outside, an impatient string of remonstrances at the delay ; as—

“ Why, Annechy ! open, I say—art thou gone mad, woman, so to scare the house ? A pretty welcome for a famished man at his own door ! Why, Hans—Bertha, maiden !—will none of ye unlock this door, and let me come ben ? ”

“ It is Van Heylen ! ” cried Bertha, the first

to give intelligent utterance to her surprise.

“It is the *Bass* !” roared Hans.

“The *Bass* ! the *Bass* !” echoed the maids.

“My brother, my brother !” screamed with hysterical violence the ancient Annechy, whilst, in the midst of the general tumult, some minutes more elapsed before the keys could be applied, the bolts withdrawn, and entrance given to the master of the house ; who at length tottered in pale, wet, unshorn, and travel-stained, to be caught within his aged sister’s arms, who could only reiterate, amidst sobs and tears—

“A living man ! a living man !—Jan Van Heylen, speak !—art thou not a living man ?”

“Barely, sister Annechy,” replied Jan, in his usual placid tone, “since I’ve not broken bread since yesterday noon, that’s seventeen hours—the saints support me !—I’d better have stopped over the postern at Ruremonde, where I fasted not at least—but you bewilder me, Annechy, and I forget. Go thou, Hans, take the horse from that honest fellow dripping without ; bid him enter, and do thou,

Juffrow, bestir these hussies gaping on, and let us have wherewithal to eat, in abundance, ere ye ask questions I've no pith left in me to answer."

Here, catching a glimpse of Bertha, as his sister bustled away from him to do for once his bidding without question, he stalked hastily towards her, crying in a quicker and kinder tope,

"Weep not, maiden, weep not, since we will have revenge; I see thou dost know all—aye, aye, ill tiding rides with sharp spurs; but weep not, fear not, for, whilst I live, thou hast yet a father."

So saying the old man caught both her wrists within his long bony hands, and holding her at arms' length to prevent her embrace, exclaimed, "Come thou no nearer, for I am sodden with a whole night's rain."

Leonard was yet looking half envious at this picture, when, as Heylen gave utterance to the last sentence, he was in turn startled by a well known voice, replying, with—

"A night's rain, grandfather? say a morning's rain too, an ye please, and tell no lie—

since here's a shower falling now, might content any water-rat or garden-worm in all England."

"Hah!" cried Heylen, "thou stout and merry rogue, welcome, welcome."

"Hawkwood!" exclaimed Leonard, in the same breath.

"What, eh, is it?—What, Len! Master Leonard!" shouted Gilbert, in a voice that made the hall ring, leaping, as he spoke, like a fond bull-dog upon his recovered friend.

"Why, this is rare!—I here cry quits with old Margery Misfortune, for all that's past."

The honest face of Gilbert glistened as he cleared the moisture from his half-blinded eyes; and hearty and long were the mutual congratulations that followed; in these Van Heylen failed not to join, amidst, however, reiterated demands for a plentiful and speedy supply of viands.

These strange arrivals diverted for a time, if they did not abate the distress of the chief mourner, here; much of interest remained to be re-

hearsed ; and food and drink being in sufficient abundance placed before the hungry master of the house, he listened, as he eat, to Leonard's detail of Sturrie's tidings, on the main point of which he was already informed, whilst, after his prosy rambling fashion, he in turn told the manner of his present appearance in Gilbert's company.

Hawkwood's own story, divested of the episodes he ingeniously contrived to interweave with it is told in few words. No sooner, then, on the night of his being separated from his party, did our worthy find himself on board of the *Free Maiden*, than he resolved to conform to that course giving the most ready promise of freedom ; his reckless hardihood had already made a strong impression in his favour amongst men who considered the possession of courage an ample substitute for the cardinal virtues ; his humourous replies to Father Mathieu's examination of him made the reprobate priest his friend, and at the first hint being thrown out to him on the subject of a change of service, the

self-cunning of his questions, as to the advantages to be so gained, completely lulled suspicion; and in the end unscrupulously swearing fealty to his new banner, he was admitted into the service of Count de Rerefonde, and soon left nearly uncontrolled.

The appearance and condition of Heylen attracted his attention, whilst yet on board the *Free Maiden*, after a little time, he failed not to discover the connexion between the late adventure and the wounded prisoner; and this once made clear, he resolved to stir no foot until he could make his new friend the partner of his flight.

Arrived at Rerefonde however he found the matter not quite so easy of execution as he had calculated on; for in Sir Alaine's absence, a very strict discipline was observed within the castle; until being sentry over Van Heylen on the night of Conrade's return, he took from the postern guard-room the large cloak and the helmet of one of the men-at-arms off duty, and putting them on his prisoner, there was little difficulty

in passing him outward in the bustle and ceremony attendant upon Courtressin's reception ; whilst Gilbert after secured, as has been seen, his own escape and the good horse to whose mettle, aided by Van Heylen's knowledge of the country, they were ultimately indebted for their present safety.

Scarcely had Heylen concluded his meal, and Gilbert his story, when a fresh knocking was heard without, accompanied by a demand for admittance, in the King's name ; and great indeed was the surprise of all parties to behold the royal Edward in person enter, followed by Sir William Sturrie, Wilton, and Audeley.

In the kindness of his generous nature, the gallant monarch had come thus early to break to his young charge the death of her kinsman, and to bid her be of good heart, saying in conclusion—

“ I have most cause for sorrow, since *I* have lost my nearest friend and stoutest ally, whose place none other can to me fill up ; but thou, my pretty maiden, hast but exchanged one

guardian for another ; then mourn not, gentle heart, but look on Edward of England as thy fast protector, for truly will I fulfil the vow I pledged to my dead friend, thy father."

With eager haste did Edward listen to a brief detail from Leonard, of Van Heylen's appearance here, and the condition of affairs at Rerefonde, together with the captivity there of young Philip de Courtressin.

Finally, calling Van Heylen aside, the King whispered in his ear, "I am acquainted with the *true* birth of this said Courtressin." Van Heylen distended his eyes slightly—the King went on—"Thinkest thou this traitor, Rerefonde, suspects so much?"

"Impossible, unless the pagan devil he serves has whispered it to him—and how your Grace came by the knowledge!"—

"By no such agency, be assured, honest Master Heylen," laughingly interrupted Edward ; "then is the boy, as young Courtressin, safe?"

"I fear still less so on that account, since, in

that shape, he stands the only bar between the vulture of Rerefonde and the wide lands of Courtressin."

"Then must we be speedy ; and now, Master Heylen how say you to don breast-plate and iron pot, and strike a blow against the walls that pent you in so roughly ? If you are so minded, band your burghers quickly and follow me ; for this night will I sleep within the shadow, at least, of this same vulture's nest."

The movements of the King partook, in this instance, of the decision natural to his character ; within two hours from Sturrie's arrival, the van-guard of the small force assembled here was, under the leading of Gervaise de Wilton, already on the march for Rerefonde, with orders to occupy the passes between that place and Ghent, and so intercept all communication.

The gentlemen and men-at-arms forming the main battle, and who might be about one hundred strong, together with double that amount of archers and cross-bows, received orders at

the same time to hold themselves in immediate readiness, and the town in a short time rang with the bustle of willing preparation ; for the English here though few in numbers, were chiefly composed of the best spirits of the land, all weary of inactivity and burning to emulate, under the King's banner, the exploits of Derby in the south.

On the part of the King there had arisen a personal stimulant even stronger than the desire he felt to revenge the Ruward and chastise the desertion and apostacy of Sir Alaine, since, on the afternoon before, there had been reported to him, by one of his cruisers, the arrival of a considerable fleet upon the coast, whose purpose the communications of Maltravers had in some measure prepared him for, although, in the anticipation of success, he had at first slighted, and afterwards forgotten the intelligence, until brought to mind by the present circumstances, when, coupled with the which, it became somewhat alarming.

He was here, in a strange country, with a

small force, and, for aught he knew, surrounded by allies as treacherous as Rerefonde, besides his present uncertainty as to the extent of the tumult and the numbers of his open foes, whilst without lay ships of thrice his force ready, perchance, to pounce upon him should he attempt to suddenly make for England as he now felt himself, an outwitted and a baffled man. Hence was it that he resolved so promptly to anticipate his enemies, and make the first blow against Rerefonde, whom he rightly viewed as the prime mover of these wide mischiefs.

To do this effectually, however, circumstanced as he at present was, required some address as well as boldness; for here were a number of the country seigneurs, who, however regardless they might be as to the rights of their prince, were extremely jealous of their own privileges, and might, if not rightly managed, take umbrage at any attack made by a stranger upon one of the highest

of their body, although they cared nothing for the man himself.

Calling, therefore, these nobles together, the King shortly explained to them the desertion of Rerefonde, who was engaged for six months service in Guienne, his supposed connexion with the late troubles, and, lastly, accusing him of having, in London, on a late occasion, been guilty of much violence to those coming on his, Edward's, errand, which violence ended in murder ; for all which, as he declared, he was resolved forthwith to proceed to Rerefonde, and, with their help, do such justice on the Count as the case loudly called for.

When the King had thus made known his will, and requested the company of those assembled here, great was the diversity of opinion that prevailed at the council—the weak or the cunning fawned, hesitated, and advised ; others, made bold by the late events, with more audacity, denied the right of England to make war on a free noble of Flanders,

who had thought fit to renounce its service, and who, if wrong had been done in his name, might be innocent of the acts of his people—the more moderate offered to go forward and summons the Count to the King's presence, when, if he proved contumacious, or persisted in any shew of violence, these pledged their aid in any act against him.

But Edward well knew that his strength lay in the rapidity of his present movement, and plainly saw that on this, as on former occasions of emergency, his mercenary allies were likely to prove, at last, but a rotten stay; seeing, then, how the wind set with these time-serving men, he hastily broke up the council, announcing that his march would commence on the instant, when those that would might go on with him, or otherwise abide his return; whilst to such as wearied of his company and resolved to seek their homes, he tendered fair thanks for their presence and good service, and here bade them “God speed.”

This resolution and cheerful countenance of the King had an effect persuasion might have failed to produce, for, as he rose, several of those present declared their intention to follow him ; amongst others, Sir Ulic Von Konigsfoorde, and the Lord of Harlébeck, both kinsmen of the apostate noble's, who were in no way satisfied with the detention of Philip de Courtressin..

On the breaking up of the council, the King proceeded forthwith to arm himself as for battle ; in due time, the Lord de Mowbray having announced that all were mustered under arms, the gallant monarch stepped from his floating palace, and mounting his war-horse, gave the word, “ Raise banners, and set forth ! ”

Sincere was the grief on this morning displayed throughout Sluys for the Ruward's death, for he had been a singular benefactor to the town, and was well beloved by all classes of its inhabitants ; accordingly when, in conformity with the general stir and preparation, the town-council was assembled, and Heylen had

harangued them in his usual short but emphatic manner, calling upon them for very shame to resent the insult offered to all free men in his person, as well as to revenge the Ruward's murder; his desires proved so much in accordance with their own feelings, that they met with unanimous support, so that orders for a general arming of the burghers were issued, and obeyed with unusual alacrity.

The moveable portion of the town-band were speedily mustered by tuck of drum, furnished with their well-kept arms, and committed to the leading of the veteran Van Heylen, whose personal bravery had been proven in every fight for liberty which had taken place in Flanders during the last forty years.

With a more stately pace did the stanch old patriot retrace his homeward steps, and, in a more peremptory tone than he was accustomed to use there, did he order his harness to be brought to him, and a parting meal prepared. Great was the horror of his sister, when, roused from Bertha's chamber by

this news, she entered within that of her brother, to behold him busied, with the aid of Hans and an armourer, fitting on to his shrunken frame the same stout hauberk and chausses of mail he had worn at the fight of Cassel. To her volume of questions, Jan replied, in all humility, but with more than his accustomed brevity, bidding her be assured that he was not casing his old limbs in armour without good cause.

“Cause or not,” replied the vexed maiden, “it needs light matter to thrust thy gray hairs under an iron bonnet, and well in troth doth the like bescem thy years and present weak condition !”

“Sister, be at peace, and vex not thy patience,” cried Jan, proceeding with his work, in no way angered by the dictatorial tone of the Juffrow, to which he was well accustomed, and whose tongue in his moments of waggersy he had used to say, was ever his warning-bell against matrimony, “since,” shrewdly argued Jan, “if a sister rides so heavy over a man,

what must be endured at the tongue of a wife, from whose side there is no fleeing."

"Patience," retorted Annechy, "one had much need of patience to rule thee, who art born a wilful fool, and must needs die a fool's death, despite of my counsel and the care of the saints, who have so oft saved thee, that their patience, like mine, must be quite spent and gone in the vain office."

Jan was too resolute to be moved, and, with his phlegmatic face unruffled, continued to direct his warlike toilet, answering this outbreak with—

"Annechy, my good woman, spare thou thy breath to keep clear house withal, for go I surely will; it is not in woman's tongue to stay me from giving one blow against that vulture of Rerefonde, even for the sake of him that is gone."

The entrance of Bertha during this pithy announcement of his determination, had in no slight degree encouraged Jan, and also, in some

sense, smoothed the asperity of the sister's next reply.

“But how wilt thou, by running thy old cracked head against this wall, help him that lies cold in his coffin?—evil days and few be on those that laid him there.”

“Peace, woman,” cried Jan, singularly moved, “thou knowest not my motive—is not his—?” He checked himself—then stretching forth his long bony hand, tremulous with agitation, went on, “Is not, I say, young Philip Courtressin prisoner there? and was not that wild boy ever nearest the heart-blood of my true friend and ruler, Jacob? and shall I rest, and leave him in that wolf's fold, to be rent like him that is gone?—No, think it not, Annechy, my woman, sooner would I peril life ten times over! So vex not thyself for me.”

“Nay, I am enough vexed already, the Virgin knows,” cried Annechy, softened by Bertha's presence, whom she much loved, and whose feelings she feared to wound, “and sorely rue that poor child being so trapped;

yet of him is there little fear, for is not the Count his nearest of kin? and it is not in nature that he should harm him—or even if he would, he dares not, for full well he knows the very stones of Ghent would rise to do justice on his wronger.”

“As the men of Ghent have risen to do justice towards him whose blood is yet red in their streets,” bitterly retorted the old man, drawing tighter the buckle of his sword-belt as he spoke, “no, no, we’ll do this much ourselves—we, the free burghers of this poor town of Zealand—and shew that all the flock forget not the good shepherd, whose care had kept them to full pasture till some of the brute herd, made wanton by their pride, turned upon and gored him. Weep not, my maiden,” he added, turning to Bertha, where at a little distance from the open casement she stood, and with tearful eyes watched each movement of the King’s array as gallantly filing from the western gate, it bent northward towards Rerefonde. The eye of the old man now also caught the

dazzling sunbeams reflected from the bright harness of this choice band, and his cold features became lighted up on the instant. "Look, look on yonder chivalry of the brave islanders, Annechy," he cried, drawing her suddenly forward ; " look, I say, and fear not, the abiding of Rerefonde before the face of their King's banner."

At this moment the discordant horns of the burgher-guard were heard loudly summoning their leader ; without more words, the stout cloth-worker hurried away, and was shortly after marching on foot at their head in the track of the cavalry, whilst bringing up his rear, came a number of sturdy women in charge of the commissariat cars, of which the number did ample justice to the foresight of the citizen campaigners.

Leaving these worthies to their unaccustomed toil, it is proper here to revert to the King's battle, as it has been named, along with which rode the few foreign knights who yet shrunk not from the English interest.

The road, if such a term may in courtesy be permitted to the route pursued by the little army, was heavy beyond description, and through the wet sand and deep loam which alternately occurred, the armed horses but slowly made their way, although inspired by the presence and example of the King, who now rode under the nominal command of the Baron de Mowbray, thinking it perchance derogatory to head a force to chastise a Flemish noble, but in reality continuing in his own person to discharge all the duties of both knight and leader.

Audeley and Leonard rode in attendance on the King ; following the latter came Gilbert Hawkwood, and much amused were they both by the merry spirits of the honest fellow, who beguiled the way by a whimsical detail of his adventures within the castle they were now marching against, together with a shrewd picture of its garrison and other inmates.

“ And this castle itself, honest Hawk, this eyrie of your late friend, Sir Vulture—is it a nest ill to come at ?” enquired Audeley.

“For the hold itself,” answered Gilbert, “I may not brag much, for it is low seated, and one may gallop at it to within some long lances’ length of the wide ditch; but for those inside of it, I promise you no stouter men ride here—no, not among those nearest to the King himself, or any less likely to cry craven, at a pinch of need. St. Mary! an if the service had but been lawful, and I without care elsewhere,” added Gilbert, casting a sheepish look on Leonard, “I’d never a’ sought braver companions to live or die with.”

“Why, Leonard,” cried Audeley, laughing, “this varlet of thine is a lover of his late fellows! I pray the saints we find as much cause for commendation ere we part from them, for worse ways I’d not seek to come by my dearest friends.”

Thus beguiling the way, they continued to toil bravely on, but, despite their best exertions, it was nearly dark before they fell in with the outpost of the advanced guard, under de Wilton, which, being composed of light armed

hobblers, had made its way good in a much shorter time, and now lay posted between the castle and the Ghent road, in order to check any retreat of the garrison on that place, had such movement been attempted—whilst here they had also, as it appeared, intercepted a courier, and if his report might be credited, Sir Alaine's party in Ghent was utterly crushed and overthrown.

The King's tent was already pitched about fifty paces in front of a little cover thickly grown with dwarf wood of various kinds, and along the line of this the different English leaders made such preparation for passing the night as the hurried nature of their departure had left in their power, whilst to their hardy retainers, the close cover in the rear offered a sufficient shelter at this fine season of the year, although there were many here who, even at this late hour, and wearied as they were, would have preferred at once going forward to the assault, and winning by the strong

hand the better cheer and shelter of the noble castle before them.

About half bow-shot to the right of the ground occupied by the King, the Flemish nobles sat them down, each under his own banner, whilst at a little greater distance, to the King's left, the Marshal marked out the ground to be taken up by the Sluys burghers ; this stretched between the coast and the castle, on the northern side of which, over against the royal camp, lay de Wilton and his Marchmen—and so was the place invested on every side, without those within offering the slightest molestation, or manifesting even any consciousness of their being so beleaguered.

It was now resolved, by the advice of Sir Ulic de Konigsfoorde, that Count Alaine should be forthwith summoned to render up young Philip de Courtressin, unjustly called his prisoner, and further, be cited in person to appear and answer to sundry charges of violence lately done against the laws of England, and upon

those under the protection of those laws, to the which he had thus rendered himself amenable, as well as to account for his sudden abandonment of King Edward's service before the time agreed on ; Sir Ulic pledging himself on the part of the Flemings here, that if Sir Alaine treated this summons with contumacy, they would do their best to force him to quick compliance.

This measure being decided on, the heralds were ordered to prepare the summons in form ; and in the mean time it becomes necessary to take a review of the movements of those within the place, now so jeopardied.

CHAPTER VI.

This day, each hour of which had been so busily filled up by the one party, was not less eventfully occupied by the other, nor did time pass by without bearing to Rerefonde a full measure of good and evil tidings.

First came a courier to the Count from his friends in Ghent, who painted the situation of affairs as most critical, and urged his advance to their aid as the only chance of holding their gained success. On the heels of this advice, came a messenger from Count Lewis, describing that Prince as utterly surprised by the suddenness of the late explosion, wholly unpre-

pared to advance, and indeed fearful of trusting himself amongst those of Ghent, unless assured on good grounds of their entire submission, or till such time as he at least should learn of Sir Alaine's being at the head of a force giving promise of success; till the arrival of which, he warned his daring partizan to stir no foot from the coast.

The counsel of the Gantois, hazardous though it was, suited much better with the bold nature and desperate situation of Alaine, and would, in all probability, have been immediately followed by him, had he not within the same hour received certain assurance, that by midnight Barberoux would be at anchor on the coast, with Croquart and the promised supplies, all well, and ready and willing to follow his leading, a piece of intelligence which at once determined him to remain within his present hold, where, during the short time yet to elapse, he had small reason to expect being assailed.

Giving directions therefore, that all things should be held in readiness for instant depar-

ture, and sending notice to Lewis at Ruremonde, of the blow he contemplated, as well as to apprize his party in Ghent of the near approach of succour, he next devoted himself to the consideration how best to further his aims on the supposed Courtressin, for the completion of which there remained but scanty time indeed.

On this same morning, the light-hearted Philip early quitted the couch whereon he had dreamed only of Alzire; and if to his waking senses, at this calm hour, memory recalled the fearful scenes of the preceding morn, the sound of that maiden's voice, caught as he descended to the hall, at once banished the painful recollection, whilst before one glance of her bright eyes the cloud upon his brow vanished, as the light mist on the hill-top dissolves beneath the glowing influence of the summer sun.

How short appeared the after hour, when during the time Sir Alaine was occupied with his couriers, this enamoured pair walked to-

gether on the outer wall, and how sweetly conscious was the smile of the innocent Alzire, when suddenly halting and with extended finger pointing towards the east, her companion, in a tender, hesitating voice, whispered—“Didst thou ever, beautiful Alzire, bethink thee when walking here, to cast a backward glance towards that quarter?” -

“Ah! but too often, let me answer, since I was seldom made the happier by it—yet was it not possible that I could cease to think of the good Sisters of St. Agnes, and of the many, many happy days I had passed within their walls.”

“If I thrive, sweet cousin Alzire, I swear I will endow that house with my heronry at Oeskirk, as but for that I had never, perchance, beheld thee, or passed within the gate of St. Agnes de Damme.”

“Nay, cousin, say not so,” archly replied the maiden, “for came you not first there to look on the fair face of the sweet Bertha, Artevelde’s kinswoman? and this would you have

doubtless done, though the heronry of Oeskirk had never been."

"I think not, Alzire, at least there is a chance that I might not, uns spurred by my love of hawking, have so far ridden only to look on the dark brow of a damsel, who, though lovely, I ne'er could love, but as a sister—so shalt thou not persuade me out of making this gift to the kind nuns, that is, provided I *thrive* by my visit," added the youth, in an impressive whisper, fixing, as he spoke, a tender regard on her whom he addressed. "For if I do not so thrive, better for me I had never owned or followed hawk or heron, but instead, been bed-ridden for life within my house of Courtressin."

"Why then must I, in very charity, pray that you may so thrive, gentle cousin," cried Alzire, laughingly, "since I would not the convent of St. Agnes should lose all chance for this generous *conditional* gift of yours."

"Then know that it lies greatly within thy power, lovely Alzire, to serve this house thou

wishest so well to, by helping to make my *condition* positive.*

The maiden, for some reason or other replied not to this only by a deep blush, raised doubtless by some inward suggestion, whilst the speaker, checking his impassioned manner, continued—

“Albeit, I will not now venture to tell you in plain words by what means you may do this service, for I read by that blush it is already whispered to your heart.”

Whatever secret was whispered there, it rested inviolate within its sanctuary, since after this no word more was spoken by the maiden past a mere monosyllable, until such time as they were joined by her mother and Count Alaine; stepping to the side of the former, the maiden passed forward, whilst from the latter Philip learned of the necessity of his departure on the following morning.

It needed but little skill to divine the state of the young man's heart, as this news was breathed in his ear by the observant Rerefonde, closed by a courteous request that he

would consider himself in perfect freedom, and be prepared to set forward suddenly for Sluys, under an honourable escort, there to be placed in security within the hands of his friends.

“ And you, Count Alaine ? ” stammered forth the confused youth, scarce conscious of the question.

“ My movements, cousin Courtressin,” replied the Knight, with a grim smile, “ may be hereafter loudly enough bruited ; at present, although I nothing doubt of your honour, they must remain untold, since they concern others’ weal more than mine own.”

“ And—and, Alzire ?—the—the Countess, I mean ? ”

“ Will accompany me this bout, and partake the rough chances of a soldier’s fortune for a while ; for I fear me this house will in a short time prove but a perilous shelter for them.”

“ Accompany you—but whither ? ” impetuously demanded the youth ; then restraining himself, he strove to proceed—“ But your pardon ; I have no right. I—I thank you, kins-

man, and will depart forthwith—only I thought that I might, if only out of gratitude for your courtesy, offer in this rude time to——” Here poor Philip became utterly bewildered ; a consummation not a little forwarded by the grave look and unmerciful silence maintained by the crafty Count. After again collecting himself, he hastily added a request that he might be permitted a private interview, when he could more rationally explain the true cause of his present strange agitation.

In a short time then this interview took place within the Knight's own chamber, and here was fully made known by the enamoured boy, from first to last, the whole story of his love for his fair cousin ; to all which Sir Alaine listened as though it was to his ear strange indeed ; and visibly was he moved when, in conclusion, the impetuous suitor expressed in ardent language his desire to make the maiden his wife.

Much too, and wisely and father-like did Rerefonde dilate upon the haste of this conclu-

sion, of the extreme youth of both, and of the want of a guardian's approbation of a match which otherwise he, with great openness, confessed was not in his eyes displeasing, since it would once more unite, under one name, the great possessions of the house, that in his mind ought never to have been severed.

After, however, a proper time had been passed in the advancement of these arguments on one side, and the refutation of them on the other, the scene concluded by Sir Alaine referring the suitor to Alzire for an answer, at the same time promising himself to move the maiden's mother in his behalf; when all things proving fortunate, the period might not be far distant till they should meet again, to part less suddenly, and then to separate on a yet dearer footing.

Although distance and parting were heavy accompaniments to the music of Sir Alaine's reply, the happiness of this present hour banished the coming separation from the hearts of both the lovers, who, thus authorized, and with such brief time for wooing, soon revealed

to each other that which had long been felt by both, although till now untold save to the moon—in all ages the universal confidant of tongue-tied lovers.

Excepting this too happy pair, who had nor eyes nor ears, save only for themselves, there were few even amongst the most reckless assembled here but watched, with lowering brows, the progress of this summer day ; for heavy news came thick, and from the wearied riders it was known that all went ill at Ghent. Deputies from which city, as Sir Alaine was now informed, had already set forth, under the guidance of Sir Johan de Maltravers, to throw themselves at the feet of the English king, and offer him all the satisfaction for the consequences of the tumult, which yet lay in their power.

To crown all came at last a blow least of all expected at this time, and this was the word brought by a vigilant scout of the approach of a body of mounted archers from the direction of Sluys. So marvellous appeared this

speed, that Rerefonde remained incredible until Conrade Stetten having, in person, reconnoitred the advance under de Wilton, returned and confirmed, past doubt, this sudden hostile movement of the active Edward.

Cut off, as by the existing state of things he was, from Ghent, but two courses remained to the Knight: the one to sally forth on the spur, and, overthrowing de Wilton's force, endeavour to fight his way into France, abandoning at once his cause, his present fortune, and his high hopes, and sinking into the ranks of "*les avolez*," crawl through life, a beaten, banished man; the other, boldly to remain even where he was, till the arrival of Barberoux, whose coming he had no cause to suspect was known to Edward, and which might be looked for in a tide or two despite the light wind blowing off shore: meantime, with the garrison he had, he might not reasonably dread the first assault of any force, laying aside the chance he yet possessed of being able to temporize, and so gain time until strong enough to choose his

course ; when, in the event of gaining the fleet, his genius whispered he would yet arrive in time to turn the fortune of the day at Ghent, and bring Count Lewis in triumph home by his own wit and hand, despite of the dead Ruward and the living king.

On this measure, then, did he decide ; and, announcing it to his principal followers, received from them in return prompt assurance of their determination to stand or fall by his fortune ; next giving directions that no hostile demonstration should be made against the English *avant garde*, he contented himself henceforth with carefully watching the movements without ; and, holding all things in readiness, coolly awaited the attack, or whatever else might be the event.

Now also it was that Rerefonde resolved to turn the occasion thus offered into the means at once to bring to a happy issue one point at least of his policy.

Entering with a cheerful but determined air within the chamber where Philip sat, endeavour-

ing to calm the fears of the timid Countess, whilst Alzire stood gratefully listening by his side.

“Now, fair cousin,” he cried, “your *English* friends, resolute to spare us the task of sending you to them, have kindly come to our poor place of Rerfonde to fetch you hence; by my faith you’re highly honoured in this kingly escort. if, as speaks report, Edward of England in person leads against so humble an enemy.”

“And what, in this case, do you purpose?” demanded Philip, in reply to this communication.

“To keep this wall,” resolutely replied Sir Alaine, “as long as good men may keep a poor place when fighting for life or death against a merciless foe.”

“Such at least is not King Edward at all times found.”

“Such at least will he be found by me and mine, unless we prove the stronger, cousin; nor can I, in justice, look for less at his hand, since mine has surely robbed the brow of his son of the diadem of this rich country, which,

held by a thread only, hung cowering over it."

Thus saying, the Knight paced the room with an air of triumph. Philip watched him earnestly for a short time, then taking within his own the hands of the two weeping women, he slowly advanced before the Count, and, bending his knee, passionately began—

"Kinsman, Count de Reréfonde, look upon this beauteous maiden ! on her mother, scarcely less lovely ! bethink you then of the perils of a leaguer, of the horrors acted within a place won by the red blade and entered in hot blood by merciless men ; if then, your resolution be still fixed to abide the issue, at least spare yourself the agony of knowing that the safety of these dear ones is dependant on the mere chance of battle."

"Rise, and say on, cousin," cried Sir Alaine, seemingly endeavouring to hide his well feigned emotion. Philip again and in a yet more impressive tone proceeding—

"Give me then, I beseech you, an imme-

diate claim to avow myself the maiden's guardian and the protector of her mother, this done, to my care forthwith consign these dearest trusts, until, in a happier hour, I may restore both to your arms; meantime, as my bride, all honour will be paid to Alzire and her mother, and through my mediation I yet hope——”

“Talk not of mediation,” interrupted Sir Alaine, “stay there, Courtressin, since it is vain to dream of that, than which no dream is less substantial; but for the frank and noble suit, advanced at such an hour, that, indeed, merits reply as candid and as generous; freely then do I thank you for this offer, cousin, and after some short converse with these who stand so mournful here, cowards that they are, you shall hear my full answer; this much now I am free to confess, were but these in safe and honourable keeping, my wit would be the clearer, my heart the lighter, and my arm the heavier—judge from this avowal if I am your foe, Courtressin,” he

added, with a smile, conducting him towards the door, "and so, for a short time, fare ye well."

Casting a pleading look towards the ladies the lover quitted the chamber ; whilst having thus freed Alzire of the embarrassment of Philip's presence, Sir Alaine proceeded to advise her of his desire, and of the necessity which rendered the step so peremptory ; as for the mother she was already aware of her lord's will, the which she seldom found courage to dispute, nor, perchance, in this case, felt much desire to do so, or, if at all, it was not to this disposition of her child, but only to the precipitancy of the manner she would have objected ; submission, however, to the decrees of him who, despite his cold and selfish ambition she tenderly loved, had been her wont for years ; only on the point of leaving him in the castle at such a time did she exhibit a show of resistance to his directions, and on this even she had now given way, urged by the necessity she felt of sustaining her daughter by her company and countenance amongst

the strangers on whom she was about so suddenly to be thrown, and where she might too soon find her mother her only friend.

This point settled, and the impatient lover acquainted with his coming happiness, Sir Alaine resolved that if the nuptials of his daughter were somewhat hurried, they should, at least, despite the lowering atmosphere without, lack of no state or ceremony, the observing of which came within the scope of his present means; and from this hour accordingly great were the preparations carried on within the castle, even up to that moment when the blast of a trumpet from without announced the arrival of the English herald, demanding entrance and speech with the Count on the part and in behalf of Edward of England, and sundry great lords of Flanders.

This summons was received with all respect, and after being duly reported, all the other forms and ceremonies being over, was admitted within the walls; in a short time after, conducted by Stetten and d'Aurai, and

attended by his own trumpet and serjeants-at-arms, Sir William Whitehorse, the King's herald, was in a stately manner ushered to the presence of him whom he sought.

At the upper end of the great hall, which was brilliantly illuminated, was a slightly raised platform of considerable extent, in front of this stood an altar splendidly decorated, to the right of which, beneath a canopy of state, sat the Lord of Rerefonde, clad in complete steel, saving, that on his head he wore the cap of maintenance appertaining to his high rank; by his side stood the chief officers of his household in their dresses of ceremony, and a little way in front of the platform his own herald, sumptuously clad and properly attended; whilst, from hence to the door, a wide lane was formed by double rows of men-at-arms, each holding his tall lance erect before him.

As led by the two fully armed esquires, the herald of England crossed the threshold of the lofty entrance, from which drooped, in

rich folds, the banner of the house, Sir Alaine arose, with an air of proud respect raised for a moment the cap he wore, and, bare-headed, advancing, as Sir William approached, as far as to where his own herald stood, here halted, and being again covered, cried aloud—

“Thou art welcome, Sir William Whitehorse, to this our castle of Rerefonde, the which, trust me, should have been so ordered as not to have held your royal master bidding so long without its gates, had due notice but been sent of the high honour of this visit.”

“I grieve, Count Alaine de Rerefonde,” answered the venerable herald, with a cold, dignified air, “that you have forced so rude a course upon our good King, and trust that you may yet have the wit to avoid the effects of his just anger; so much from myself for sake of old acquaintanceship, and in requital of your courtesy; now hear mine errand from the noble Baron de Mowbray, on the part of the King of England, and those Lords of Flanders in arms before this place.”

Here was formally read the summons of the King, to the effect of what has been already rehearsed.

Sir Alaine listened in profound silence, till the formule being gone through, he retired back to his place of state, and, seating himself, made reply—

“ Sir Herald, it is known to you that I am a free noble of Flanders, as well as of the Rhine, and owe allegiance only to my feudal sovereigns, Count Lewis of Flanders and the Emperor, or his appointed vicar; therefore may I not admit the right of Edward of England over me either for question or summons in this land—but waving this, out of the great love I bear his person, and because I would not have my name attainted with treachery to his cause through chances—whose course although I might not control, I can well explain—I will allow this summons, and thus by you reply—

“ First, for the charge of having changed my course and coming hitherward whilst bound on the King's service to Guienne—I learn, Sir Wil-

liam, that when at the Thames mouth with the intent of so voyaging, news was brought to me of this sudden outbreak, as also of his highness's presence here, amidst a tumult likely to desolate this unhappy country. On this hearing, I did change my purpose, and bade the English pilots steer for this shore, where but yesterday I landed to learn that which has really called down the King's anger on my head.

True it is that my first esquire here did, two days before, pass forward to Ghent, but in this he acted without orders of mine, for how could I direct a movement which, being upon the seas, I was wholly ignorant of. Certain it is however he went thither by the counsel of those in Ghent, thinking to keep the peace during the Ruward's absence ; being once there, how far he was after misled I know not rightly as yet, nor in reason can I be supposed amenable ; but that he contemplated no violence against Artevelde is plain, since he undertook his safety when beset by those who sought his life, and on his charge being after foully stabbed, he with

his own hand slew the murderer, even where he stood in the midst of his ruffian followers.

“Next, for my kinsman of Courtressin, whom I am accused of making prisoner, he, let me say, is at present my honoured guest, and is about to be made the husband of my only child; of his captivity yourself shall be the judge, and the ceremony for which we now stand prepared, —at which we crave your presence—being concluded, he shall accompany you back to those kind kinsmen who come here prepared to do him right—the which I blame not, although their zeal shews more of heat than wisdom, to pryck them on to such a hasty course, and force me, for mine own safety, to parley thus with closed doors against one on whose approach the very walls of Rerefonde should have fallen to give him a more ready entrance.

“For the third charge of murder, it is too vaguely put to need other answer than to say ’tis false, the which I will be bound fairly to prove when I shall know my accusers.

“Rehearse these things plainly as I put

them, Sir Herald, I pray you, and in conclusion say, that although, with due reverence, I deny his Grace's right to summon me, being a free noble, and amenable only to the call of my feudal sovereign for homage, suit, or service; yet let there, by to-morrow noon, be sent some noble knight of rank fitting to become my hostage, here to abide my safe return, and I will on that instant forth and clear my fame before the King, in the teeth of my accusers, whom by you I here defy."

"I will do this honestly, doubt not, Count Alaine," answered the Herald, "and much it glads me to be the bearer of an explanation offering such fair promise."

"And now," said Sir Alaine, in a less stately tone, "advance, I pray, Sir William, and be a witness of the ceremony which binds once more together the too long severed kindred houses of Rerefonde and Courtressin."

Here, on a signal given, the tapestry at the left of the platform was raised on one side, and immediately after there appeared advancing on to it the priest, Father Mathieu, clad in

his richest vestments, attended by incense-bearers, and two pages with cushions; at the same moment Sir Alaine rose and passing by this first group, gave his hand to his lovely daughter, who, clinging to the side of her mother, half shrunk to appear before this strange warlike assemblage; behind her followed the handmaidens belonging to herself and the Countess, and as she advanced she was met by her young husband, who, all radiant with smiles stepped lightly from the opposite side to meet his bride.

The priest paused before the altar—the pages arranged the cushions at his bidding: the principals were at their places, and at this moment it was that, taking within his own the hand of Philip, Sir Alaine cried aloud—

“Behold all here—vassals, followers, and friends—where freely I hold my kinsman’s hand in mine, and from my heart bestow on him my blessing and my only child!”

“Live Courtressin and Rerefonde! happiness to the Ladye Alzire!” was the loud re-

sponse which rung through the old castle, and told of what passed within to the most distant centinel on the wall.

“ And if I strive not to merit this benison, and make this ladye of my true love, your gift, the which I prize above the world, happy, may a curse light on me, and may the hand of every man here be against my life, which from this hour only becomes worthy !”

Sir Alaine cast a gratified look on the English Herald, as the continued acclamations called forth by the energy of this reply again shook the hall.

The marriage ceremony now went on, and never did a lovelier pair since that hour vow fealty before God's altar : as in the full blaze of the light they kneeled together with their pale upturned faces and wrapped eyes, conscious now only as it seemed, of the presence of each other and of the gigantic priest, the deep and solemn tones of whose fine voice rose like an organ to the vaulted roof, the listening pair looked like two angels just lighted from the

skies, to preach of peace and love to the stern iron-clad men who stood ranged below, gazing like statues, awe-struck and breathless, upon the strange mystery acted here before them.

The voice of the priest at length ceased—the husband imprinted a first kiss on the pure cheek of his wife, then placing her within her mother's arms, they both hurried from this scene, to equip them for their passage to the English camp, where, having paid his respects to King Edward, Philip purposed passing forward to a village about a league nearer Sluys, there to pass the night.

“ I lament that time is too scant to bid you to the feast which we hold to-night, Sir Herald,” said Count Alaine, “ but trust you will at the least pledge one parting cup to the happiness of this young pair.”

The wine being brought, the host filled for the Herald a massy golden cup, and right heartily did the old man do honour to the pledge.

“ And now, I pray you,” added the Count

“keep the vessel in remembrance of this evening.”

“A largess ! a largess !” was on this shouted by the attendant serjeants, and as loudly echoed by the Herald of Rerefonde, who, in his place, received a similar token of the munificence of his lord ; the priest, on his part, in his turn, drank long and deeply ; and “health to the young Dame of Courtressin !” passed in full measure round the hall, till the return of the ladies—when, at a signal given, the warlike guests filed in order through the wide entrance, followed by the principals in this ceremony, now drawing to its close.

At the door, a whirlecote, drawn by two excellent horses, stood ready prepared, into which, but not without many tears and half smothered whispers, the Count placed his ladye, and gallantly following came young Philip, with his new-made bride, who having embraced her father, took her place by her mother's side.

“Adieu, Courtressin,” cried Sir Alaine, as

Philip lightly mounted his horse, "and doubt not we shall again meet under a better light."

"I carry the sun of my existence along with me, Sir Alaine !" cried the enraptured boy, "but hope soon to behold you once more within its blessed influence. Now farewell, and fear not but means may yet be found to appease the King's anger."

"Amen !" exclaimed Sir Alaine.

"Amen !" repeated the English herald, adding, "believe it, my word shall not be wanting to lead to that good end."

The little cavalcade moved on in the light of many torches—the drawbridge was passed, and here a brief and final adieu was taken ; Sir Alaine re-entering within his gates, the Herald leading the way towards the English camp, on whose watch fires the Count continued to gaze for some time, with an eager, thoughtful look ; then muttered, as he faced from the wall—

"No, no, it were but madness to attempt a surprisal against one so wary." He then turned

to meet Conrade Stetten, who, with bated breath, informed him that Potter had just arrived, having found means to pass the ill-kept lines, and that Barberoux by the next tide would be at anchor near the shore."

"Hah, this is indeed brave news!" exclaimed the Knight, and hurrying to his chamber, followed by Stetten, he there found Rainer's successor in the command of the Free Maiden, who reported Barberoux as waiting only for water to approach the land.

"Thinkest thou it were a difficult task again to pass through the leaguer of these half-cyed burgher knaves?" hastily demanded the Knight.

"I know not, now they are fairly at an anchor down," replied the sailor; "I got amongst them just as they were feeling for their moorings, in the dark—but there's no harm in trying."

"Who lies against us sea-ward, past the marsh?" demanded the Knight.

"By that way I came," answered Potter, "and there are squatted the men of Sluys, as I

found by the rattle of their women and geese, of both which they have brought good store, as one might guess by the noise."

"Call the boy Arliss hither, Conrade—he knows every turn of the plain, and will thread the way through these sleepy burghers after midnight, without troubling their watch ; he shall be thy guide, Potter ; when say to Barberoux he must prepare his every means for the quick shipment of my good followers, for early in the morning will I be with him ; get if possible by any exertion of labour, the dyke broken through, so that two horse may pass abreast on to the beach, for I doubt not we shall be close hunted ; but go thou now and feast with thy fellows in the hall, hereafter I will more fully explain my wishes."

The man bowed and retired—the Knight once more turned to Conrade, exclaiming—

"And now, Stetten, comes our fate ; we have no room for half measures—let discretion guide all heads this night, for early on the morrow must we do battle to live or die."

CHAPTER VII.

It was soon after sunrise, on the morning following the events just narrated, that some half-dozen persons were quietly promenading before the royal tent; these persons were divided into two separate groups, the most gay and animated being composed of Sir Gervais de Wilton, Leonard, and the ever lively James Audeley, awaiting, in company, the orders of the King, who, early as the hour was, had been for some time in close conference with Van Heylen and Sir William Whitehorse, who had last night returned from his errand, so strangely accompanied, although the affair continued as yet so clouded and mysterious, that

little was actually known to these promenaders as to the real state of the expelled parties.

The second and more grave-paced trio consisted of so many of the elders of the burgher guard, who had attended their leader hither, and now, in the like manner, awaited to accompany him back to their own ground.

Both groups were evidently discussing the same interesting topic, and the looks of both were for ever directed towards the walls of Rerefonde, or to the preparations going on a short distance in their front, where a number of men, passing to and from the rear cover, in regular order, were depositing bundles of fascines, intended for the service of filling up a portion of the wide ditch lying about a bow-shot in advance, in the event of the expected assault being ordered, and from the rear of the little camp, came ringing the quick, short strokes of the many busy axes employed in their formation.

Nearer to the royal tent were assembled a knot of English yemen; some seated lazily upon the ground, eating their frugal morning

meal of black bread and curd cheese, others busied in a careful examination of the condition of their strings, removing the old, or proving such as were newly fitted, by directing, with a steady eye, their weapons towards the menaced wall, drawing the string back to the right ear, and then letting it slip, with a twang that bespoke the strength of the ruling hand, as well as the elasticity and power of the deadly weapon.

The armiourers and their dingy-looking aides were hastily running to and fro, with the various pieces of harness which at this last hour were found or fancied to need alteration; moving more soberly about, were also a few of the bold burghers of Sluys, easily distinguished by their bright steel head-pieces, the thickly plated cumbrous jacques they wore full half way down the leg, and the singularly long and handsome partizans they carried over their shoulders. Thus equipped, these citizen soldiers indolently strolled about, or paused to look upon the preparations of the more practised men of war, with mingled looks of curi-

osity and pity, ever and again lifting their eyes towards their own encampment, lying at a little distance on the left, whence, at this early hour, was heard a shrill peal from many female tongues, moving in company, if not in concert ; which camp was easily distinguished, in the first place, by the great number of little clouds of light smoke that, ascending from the earth, rose curling in graceful spires, till melted in the calm air of morning ; in the second place, by certain savoury exhalations wafted hither from the same direction, creating carnal longings in the keen nostrils of hungry men, and bespeaking these honest women mindful that a good breakfast could in no ways interfere to damp a warrior's courage.

From every quarter, in fact, now sounded some note of motion, life, and spirit, save from within the walls of Rerefonde, the gaunt shadow of whose towers was flung far westward, pointing darkly and ominously towards the sea ; thence no cheerful smoke was seen to rise, nor trumpet sound was heard to greet the sun ; not a movement could be discerned

within the arch of the half-raised portcullis opposite, not a centinel even appeared in sight upon one of the many watch-towers—nay, the very flag of defiance hoisted by Count Alaine, on the topmost turret of his castle, hung drooping round its staff, heavy and motionless as the funereal banners over the tomb of his race.

“Thinkest thou, de Wilton, that our ancient court-mate, who lies so sleepily within his den there, will, in earnest, abide our assault?” demanded Audeley, as together they halted, to comment upon this treacherous calm.

“I surely think so, since 'tis hardly probable else he would push us on to such close preparations; and yet this defiance is so foolhardy and profitless a daring, 'tis barely in belief that one so politic and long-tried in war should hazard it.”

“But see you, cousin,” cried Audeley, “'tis, after all, more profitable trying any chance than rendering to be hanged, which, if the King clutches him, he will be, despite of

friend or Fleming—depend upon it, Rerefonde justly builds on the backwardness of these nobles to strike one of their own breed, he likewise knows our weakness, and so thinks he may hold us off until the King's patience tires, or some fresh outbreak on the part of these turbulent knaves, comes to his help."

"Is't truly known what numbers there be within, good Borgia?—canst tell?" demanded de Wilton.

"Some three score heavy lances," replied Leonard, "as Hawkwood reports, together with cross-bows, and others to over twice that amount."

"Ha, ha!" exclaimed Audeley, affecting a long face, "a goodly garrison, by Saint Paul, and all, I warrant, fellows that have dealt with steel and hemp too long to care for either, knowing that if they escape the first, to the last they are fore-doomed past all reprieve;—by the spurs I promised myself I should win here with such ease and safety, we've rode without reckoning, and feeling for a fox, have got a lion by the mane."

“Nay, my Lord James,” cried Leonard, “you now do this Knight too much honour, to liken him, even in jest, to so noble a beast, there being more of the wolf or tiger in his nature, than of the generous daring of the kingly lion.”

“But seriously, Borgia,” inquired Audeley, “art thou so certain now, that Sir Alaine was the foul assailant of the beauteous Commons Princess of Ghent?”

“Past doubt; for if his late treacherous desertion be even set aside, the imprisonment of Van Heylen, and all he gathered, goes to leave no other evidence needful, or so little, that I look myself to be assured of gleaning it in the coming fight.”

“Then, in the devil’s name, down with him, say I,” cried Audeley, “although ’tis pity, for he is one of the fairest jousting eyes ever looked on; a gay companion, too, at times; moreover a very courteous and gentle, and knows more of horse, hawk, and hound, than any one man besides between the Humber and the Loire—plague on’t, his crooked policy

one might have overlooked, for, after all, 'tis only in the fashion of these lordly adventurers with hungry pouches and supple consciences ; besides it may serve well enough, together with all that is past, in the end, to teach our liege lord no ill lesson, and make him less open-handed to these foreign gentles ; —faith they now-a-days, so swarm the court, that a man, to find his way, had need know all the tongues scattered abroad, from that Tower of Babel, or Babble, or however else the castle was called, our ancient chaplain at Werk used to tell of ; that which the pagan wittols sought to assault heaven from, till Saint Peter utterly confounded their tongues, and made them as incomprehensible to one another as are these Spaniards, Brabanters, Italians, and German sworders to a plain Norman gentleman never out of his own island.

“ But for his rude assault upon that pearl of beauty, the fair Bertha, however, he merits not mercy in this world or redemption in the other, whither I pray the saints it may be my for-

tune to help him to a passport. Hah! look you there!" he continued, pointing with extended finger, "if I am not blind, those within are falling the great bridge—aye, and horses too are thronging the gateway!"

"'Tis so, past dispute!" cried Leonard, after looking earnestly in the same direction.

"The knaves are never impudent enough to think on a sally?—but by God's head they aim at nothing less," exclaimed de Wilton: "see how they rattle over the bridge in close order; and now from the postern on the left run a crowd of footmen, pushing straight for the Sluys burghers' camp. Ho! trumpet!" he added, calling to one of these noisy officials standing near, "sound a blast, and rouse those guttling fellows, or they'll be saved the pains of digestion else—sound a charge, man, with all the breath thou hast. Mount, Audeley, and, for the love of heaven, ride towards those witless kaus-eaters. You, Borgia, call the guard to horse, whilst I inform the King of this bold passage."

In a moment each man was up and actively preparing for battle; for, to the surprise of all

both the great gate and posterns of the castle had, as described by Wilton, been thrown open, and a rapid charge made right for the burgher force ; at the precise moment these were just seated after their orderly fashion, busily discussing their morning meal, and ill prepared to receive such an interruption.

In vain did a few of the chiefs endeavour to form something like a square, that they might be ready with their long partizans to receive the men-at-arms, now thundering on them—vainly did they shout themselves hoarse, with the reiterated assurance that instant aid would back their efforts from the King's camp ; the panic was fairly sped, fires and flesh-pots were abandoned, certainly, and arms grasped in their stead, but hardly was a shadow of order effected, before the prying of the sharp arrows of the active archers of the assailants warned them to disperse.

In the meantime the men-at-arms pushed, unmolested, across the swamp in their front, and dashing through the burghers' defences, passed

by them without a pause, right to the rear of the lines, where, halting for a minute, each horseman received, *en croupe*, an archer or other footman, and being thus laden, again rode on in the direction of the sea-bank; whilst the bold burghers crowded like roused deer right for the English encampment, without waiting to cast a backward glance on the seaward flight of the vultures of Rerefonde.

Van Heylen was the first to rush from the royal tent, as Gervaise de Wilton, with small ceremony, broke in with the wild news of this unthought for sally; and with deep shame did the old man look on the panic flight of his townsmen, whose disorder he hurried away if possible to remedy: for a moment did the King also silently look in the direction of this movement; then turning, rapidly but clearly, gave the necessary orders for pursuit to those about him.

“ Quick, good Königsfoorde, get into saddle, and cut over for their right flank, on which I doubt not they will presently wheel,

seeking to turn short on Ghent; head them boldly if ye once encounter, and be assured we are close on their rear."

Sir Ulic departed towards the Flemish tents.

"How far is't to the sea?" demanded the King.

"About a short league, my liege."

"Just so far then may these early stirrers ride in that direction, whilst, if they turn, we have them yet sooner; I see not their drift in this movement, but mount, gentlemen, mount. You, Mowbray, move quickly forward with these bows to the castle; but yet be wary, let the pavisers cover those that bear the fascines, till we see if any be left within who choose to offer defence; if they do, and but a bird-bolt be drawn against you, hang up every living thing you find—we'll teach these rustics how they again parley with a King's summons."

With this order Edward passed back to his tent to have his cervelliere laced on, but on the men-at-arms being assembled, he quickly reappeared, sprung agilely on to the noble war-horse held ready for his hand, and himself

gave the signal to press forward in the pursuit.

Meantime the fascine bearers had gotten close to the ditch covered by the pavisers, and followed warily by the archers; but not a shot came from the walls; the bridges still remained fallen, the portcullis raised, and de Mowbray on entering at the head of his men, found the only persons left here were a few ancient lacquais, together with the terrified female domestics; leaving therefore a few men to hold the main-gate and bridge, he hurried forth again to follow in the King's steps as fast as possible.

“Rerefonde is downright mad to run into this trap,” observed Audeley to Leonard, as side by side they rode together, “since, if he passes much further this way, he must be pushed into the sea, or forced to fight at disadvantage.”

“We shall know his policy soon,” answered Leonard, “for you may see we visibly gain ground upon their rear-guard; he surely aims at winning, by the shortest, the sea-bank, since he turns not by his right, which he might do,

and, as I think, yet head Sir Ulic and his Flemings, who move forward so leisurely yonder.”

The chase was now fully up, and it was soon made evident that the pursued had no present design of turning from the sea-bank, or lofty dyke extending along the line of the ocean, against whose encroachments, indeed, it was meant to act as a barrier: notwithstanding the start gained, the party led by the King had, even in this distance, come within a long arrow-range of those whom they pursued, close in whose front the lofty bank might now be seen; arrived before this, a short halt, and some bustle and change of movement was observable in their ranks, and it was expected they were about to make a stand here, but in a minute after the horsemen of Rerefonde were hidden from sight, leaving the means of their concealment plainly evident in a large artificial trench cut through the bank, into which they had nimbly filed, it being just wide enough to allow free passage for a horse or two.

“Hah! sound trumpet, and charge on them quickly; try your beasts’ mettle now, Mes-

sieurs," cried the King, urging the destrier he rode to his best speed, for he beheld in this well contrived passage through the dyke, a mark of preparation which told him Sir Alaine was not acting without proper foresight.

The cavaliers had not arrived more than mid-way at this pace when a flight of arrows were sent thickly and well together from the top of the bank, and, at the same moment, the narrow opening became alive with cross-bow-men, who shot so close that down came four or five of the foremost English horses at the first discharge, and amongst the number, that ridden by the King; before, however, his fall could excite any apprehension the active monarch was up again, loudly giving orders to rein back and await the coming in of the foot; being himself, nevertheless, the last man who retired, which he did full slowly, with his shield before him and his face to the foe.

"Rein back nimbly, gentlemen," shouted Edward, finding a force so formidably posted; "these hardy knaves are over securely covered to be so lightly assaulted. Rein back out of

shot-range until these sleepy Flemings come up. Ride thou, James Audeley, and spur them onward.

“Sir John Seagrave, take thou a score of riders, and see, with speed, if this bank may not be turned some mile to the left here—at least, try and discover what these runaways are at, although ’tis easy to guess they seek to embark. I pray to the saints our ships are out, since, if so, we may yet have good account of them if they do slip us here; although, a plague on’t, our knave mariners love not, if they can help it, to put their ships in peril, and think ever more of their own pelf than of their king’s honour or their country’s safety; would I were sea-board with them!

“You, Borgia, go to Mowbray and press those archers on that move so slowly to my thinking, whilst we, meantime, give our beasts breath and cry patience.”

A few minutes brought a messenger from Sir John Seagrave to say that several large

galleys lay off the shore, on board of which Sir Alainc's men were being as hastily embarked as the surf, which was too heavy to allow of the near approach of the shalloups, would permit. This much they had learned from actual observation; reporting also that in no place they had examined was it possible to force horses up the dyke.

"What!" cried the King, impatiently, "must we then bide here before this gap till these villains withdraw, so giving us leave to pass through, then laugh at us from their ships? Call back Scaggrave, sound trumpets, and, in God's name, let us once more try to charge through yonder slender breach."

The onset was sounded, and the King would by his example have foremost enforced his rash order had he not been surrounded and almost forcibly withheld by those about his person, until such time as Mowbray was come up with the archers, and Sir Ulic was seen advancing briskly from the right on a line parallel with the sea-wall.

“ Ho, St. George ! forward now, you bold archers of England, and shoot freely and together,” shouted the excited monarch, as the headmost of the bowmen ran panting by, spreading themselves in front, tightening their strings, and notching their long shafts.

In a minute after these men began to shoot, stepping nimbly forward after each discharge, and it was soon seen that not a living thing might safely now abide within that open gap, or shew above the crest of the high embankment.

Closely following these moved the cavalry, led by a few dismounted men-at-arms, and they soon marched wholly unmolested by those in possession of the breach, which shewed completely clear before them ; until, just as the leading archers passed eagerly through, there arose, from the inside, cries of—

“ A Rerefonde !” “ Our Ladye of Ardembourg !” “ A Croquart for Rerefonde !” with many other such shouts, and, after a minute, the stout English archers came flying back, driven on the advancing men-at-arms, and hotly pursued by a good body of Sir Alaine’s fol-

lowers, headed by their lord in person ; beside whom, conspicuously armed with a huge mace, struck the giant Priest.

This *mêlée* was, for a brief space, well and equally maintained ; but a few of the King's archers, who had, at the moment of onset, escaped up the bank, thence so annoyed those of their foes, who fought in the breach beneath, that the latter, on a certain signal from the ships, willingly retreated down the beach, leaving the English cavalry to file without further molestation through the opening ; which having accomplished, these paused to reform their array under the inner side of the dyke, whilst the King took a steady survey of the scene before him.

At a good arrow flight from the shore lay at anchor several stout ships, having their tops and forecastles lined with cross-bows ; about them at this time were busily plying a number of shalloups, evidently engaged in the shipment of armed men ; towards other boats lying nearer to the shore, riders were seen urging their unwilling horses to bear them through the surf : some of the men being

safe on board had loosed their steeds, whilst, as the poor brutes eagerly made back for the shore, they were caught at and again forced to breast the surge with new masters, or, if missed, or found too weak or over restive, were shot by the archers, impatiently awaiting transport.

Some of these ill fated animals, so wounded, were struggling to drag themselves beyond the reach of the dreaded waves; others, newly hit, were flying madly along the beach, whilst here and there a more fortunate runaway, frightened, but unhurt, paused in the distance, gazing back on the scene with bursting eyes; and with ears and mane erect, continuing to neigh loudly and often, as if calling on his less lucky companions, whose company he was yet unwilling to quit.

About midway down, a broad deep semi-circular trench had been dug in the yielding sand, the which was impassable for horses heavily armed; within this defence were marshalled, close to the water's edge, those of Rerefonde's followers yet unembarked, whilst,

planted in their front, his banner fluttered proudly seaward.

“ St. George !” exclaimed Edward, after curiously looking on, until fully informed of all thus described, “ St. George ! but here is a sleight of soldiership as warily ordered as hardily conducted ! right worthy is it of a leader’s notice. Had this man but honesty, he were a soldier to grace a conqueror’s council ! yet must he not, without one other effort, so wholly baffle us neither.

Come, messieurs, off-horse and let us see if we cannot either turn or force yonder sandy fosse, at bottom of which, from the nature of the level, there cannot be deep water. Call up the archers, and bid our nimble footed burghers at least to shew their force upon the top of the bank, unless it be such of them as choose to seek honour by going on with us,” added the King, laughingly ; for the panic flight of the surprised men of Sluys had inspired him with no very high respect for their valour.

The whole of the pursuing force being by this period come up, these arrangements were

quickly completed, and again did the trumpet of England sound cheerily to the onset.

Quitting their horses, and rapidly as possible advancing towards the formidable ditch under the galling discharge of every kind of missile shot from the boats lying outside the surf, the forwardest of the assailants unhesitatingly flung themselves into this fosse, and sought to pass to the opposite side : here the most terrible encounter awaited them ; for in defence of this stood Sir Alaine, the renowned Cro-quart, Stetten, Guy d'Aurai, and some half-score of their most determined companions. Here too, although last named, fighting amongst the foremost, stood that free priest, Sir Mathieu, having his giant bulk clad in a loose jacque, or tunic of dressed ox-hide, thickly covered with plates of rough iron ; attached to the neck of the jacque was a hood of the like material, but this, the better to help his breathing, the holy father had now thrown back on his shoulders, and, with his closely-shaven tonsure shining in the sun, he stood, bareheaded, towering over the ditch, dealing

blows at all coming within the sweep of his heavy mace, any one of which taking fair effect, would have surely felled a buffalo.

In the face of these opposers, then, was it necessary that the gallant knights and esquires of England should scramble through, and next mount up the face of the loose sandy bank ; and in this struggle were very many hardy feats done and good blows stricken, until at length the superior numbers and unflinching courage of the King's followers carried the well-contested defence ; for although many were thrown back, dead or sorely hurt, a large majority, by degrees, gained a footing on the level with their antagonists, when the latter, on a concerted signal, suddenly separated from the press, and made hastily back to the very edge of the sea ; whilst again the assailants were forced to recoil ; for, thus exposed at such short distance, the arrows from the boats and ships might not, unchecked, be endured. Covering themselves, therefore, within the well-won fosse, they impatiently waited the advance of their own archers.

During these minutes of inaction, some of the survivors of Rerefonde's men were divesting them of the heavier portions of their armour, in order, by wading or swimming, to gain the boats, whilst others, with dark and menacing looks, yet turned their faces towards their lord's foes.

One noble horse alone stood here, held by a page, on the saddle of which S^r. Alain for a moment leaned and drew free breath; then, beckoning Croquart, he earnestly said—

“ Now do thou mount on this good horse of mine, and taking this bold boy, Arliss, behind thee, make for yonder boat—doubt not the beast; I've swam the flooded Guadalquivir on his back: lead him after to the nearest galley, and save his life, if thou canst, for my sake. I and the Priest will yet hold yon blown islanders in check a while, if they again come on, which doubtless they will do under cover of those bows advancing so briskly from the sea-bank. You, Conrade, and d'Aurai, strip and also make the best of your way to the ship, as .

ye can ; for, by our Ladye, this King will grant us scant breathing time."

"Your pardon, Sir Alaine," quietly answered Stetten ; " but not even at your command may I this day quit your side ;—whilst you bide blow, so must I ; when you seek safety, will be time enough for me also."

As he spoke, Conrade raised his vizor, to inhale more freely the cool air ; and with his last word, a shaft from one of the advancing bowmen struck him right beneath the brow. The bold esquire uttered no sound, but instinctively seeking to raise his weighty axe for defence, reeled half way about, and then fell with his face in the tide now slowly advancing on them.

"Is he dead?" demanded the Count, as Mathieu and d'Aurai both stooped to raise him.

"Rest and peace be with him!" answered Mathieu, "and he hath died unshriven at last, though but yester eve I would have had him to confession—but, rest his soul! it is now too late, he being indeed dead!"

“ Then lives there no braver man on——
Hah !—another——” exclaimed the Knight, as
a bolt, whilst he spoke Conrade’s eulogy, rung
against the top of his cervellicre, fairly razing
thé vulture crest he wore thereon.—“ a man
might as well be tied to a pole, and shot at
like a popinjay, as stand still here to be these
knaves’ butt-shaft.

“ Now, brave Croquart, away ! ~since thou
mayest better help me on board one of the
boats, than by my side—for see, I will make
a last course against those now mustering so
boldly in front there ; I owe some of them short
reckoning ; this course done, will we make
bodily through these waves, trusting to Barbe-
roux’s skill and courage to lift us bravely in :
every minute of the in-coming tide will deepen
the water, and lessen the surf ; so tell him, and
farewell !”

“ I will abide your coming till the last,
doubt not,” answered Croquart, mounting ;
when Sir Alaine, seizing the unready boy,
d’Arliss, placed him behind, and in a moment

after the well-trained destrier was calmly breasting the surf, still angrily bursting over this shallow beach, on which there were now none left save Sir Alaine, his Priest, Guy d'Aurai, and three veteran men-at-arms : looking upon these last, Sir Alaine grasped their hands, hurriedly saying—

“ Go not, good fellows, forward with me now ; you have done enough to prove your manhood this day already ; and in truth I know not, nor care, if once, in yonder press, whether I shall ever again win my way back out of it.”

“ All here will, nevertheless, go forward with you,” was the short reply of d'Aurai, which resolve the men, by a nod, confirmed

“ I cannot wait behind,” gravely cried the Priest, pulling his leathern hood over his head ; “ for if any of ye fall, some kind soul must needs be by to shrive ye, and I know of none likely to prove so charitable, save only myself—for the soul's sake, then, of you sinners, am I bound to play out this deathful game, although

it jumps not with my calling, nor with my liking. So ‘a Rerefonde!’ I say, and on with us to meet these bullies half way!”

“A Rerefonde! a Rerefonde!” cheerfully echoed the little band flinging themselves before the few knights and esquires who, on this, rushed forward from the trench, each crying his own war-cry, and all eager to do bravely in the King’s sight, who standing on the other side, clearly beheld every man’s prowess.

Foot by foot did these tried desperate men contest the space which was each moment contracted by their assailants in front, and by the flowing tide in the rear; many a good man fell for every wound of theirs, for they struck no idle blow, and kept well together, whilst those that pressed upon them, were too eager and too sure of conquest to observe much care or order.

But one by one the three good men-at-arms were hewed down at their master’s foot—d’Aurai, covered with wounds waxed faint and feeble, even Sir Alaine’s blows fell lighter and less fast: the Priest alone, red with the blood of others, still laid about him with untamed

vigour, himself a host in this close fight, and seemingly invulnerable to assault.

Suddenly, at this desperate crisis, a loud halloo informed the survivors that Croquart was at hand ; Sir Alaine turned his head, and beheld that a lightly mann'd shalloup danced in the tide abated surf only within a few yards, whilst from Barberoux's galley, now sweeping by under full sail fell a storm of missiles amongst the assailants.

"Now, now—to the boat, good d'Aurai !" cried the Knight, grasping his esquire's hand—"I'll follow, but cannot be the first to turn my back !"

The young esquire fixed his glazed eyes upon his lord, and obeying, without consciousness, the impulse thus given, staggered blindly into the water, but before he advanced three steps, stumbling against an iron mass hidden beneath the surf, he fell over the body of his comrade, Stetten, to rise no more—whilst with this movement, fearful of losing the last prey, although uncertain who it was yet standing alone at bay here, Audeley and

two or three rushed in and closed with Sir Alaine, as did several others with the Priest, who, however, offered no further resistance, but loudly called out that they should save the Count.

“Render ! whoever thou art !” cried Audeley, flinging his arms about the body of the Knight.

“Never !—our Ladye of Ardembourg !” returned Sir Alaine, feebly, smiting Audeley on the head with his dagger, as he spoke.

“Hah, ’tis the Count !” cried Van Heylen, rushing in, “kill him not now—have him alive ; ’tis the Count thou hast gripped !”

“The caution was useless, for Sir Alaine had cried his last war cry ; sinking heavily through Audeley’s arms, he dropped powerless upon his knees, and was only so held up by his adversary.

“ ’Tis but a folly to seek to raise, or move me,” calmly said the wounded Knight, to those who desired, after a minute, to bear him up—“I would speak to the Priest.”

With the hearing of this call, Mathieu suddenly burst like a roused elephant from the hold of his captors, and quietly kneeled by the side of him whose varied fortunes he had so long followed.

None sought to sunder the Father from the dying man ; a few sentences were faintly breathed in his ear by the Count, to which the confessor answered only by a confirmatory nod or other understood sign, but act of grace or devotion, such as might have well become this awful time, passed not between them—after a brief space thus spent, Sir Alain once more raised his eyes, and having bent a long look of scorn and defiance on those thronging about, he suddenly twisted with a violent throe quite round in the Priest's embrace, and, with his face thus hidden, after struggling for a few minutes in the agonies of death, the politic, bold spirit of Alain, Count de Rerefonde was for ever at rest.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE day which beheld King Edward leave Sluys for Rerefonde, gave birth to a rencontre at Bruges, to relate the course of which it here becomes necessary to quit the side of the ever victorious monarch, leaving him, together with his small array, to pursue the course they had immediately taken, back to their former quarters.

It was late on the afternoon, then, of the day alluded to, that Sir Johan de Maltravers, with the survivors of his command of hardy Welsh lances, on route from Ghent by way of Bruges,

entered the latter city, where they purposed halting for the night. Maltravers, having first disposed of his small force, as much to their ease as circumstances would admit, for great alarm of tumult prevailed in this place, and led the lower classes to view the coming of armed strangers with an evil eye, he next dismissed his personal attendants, as was oft-times his wont, and solitarily seated himself before the meal provided for him.

He was yet busied in this matter of necessary refection, when the host of the Dragon Royal, for such was the high sounding name of the hotel where head-quarters were established, entered within his chamber, and in a few words informed him that there was one without journeying towards the court, who prayed to have some word with the English leader.

“ Bid the man enter here, whoever he be,” plainly replied Sir Johan, adding, mentally, as his host quitted the apartment, “ Heaven save us, I trust he bears better news to the King’s

ear than hath fallen to my lot this bout, else will he prove but a thankless messenger."

A minute after the proprietor of the Royal Dragon returned, ushering in a second person, who he glibly informed his guest was the stranger whose purpose he had already named. Maltravers bent his look upon the man in question, who muttered some words of thanks, and great was the surprise of the Knight when, in the diminutive personage with such whispering humbleness obsequiously approaching, he at once recognized the shrivelled up visage and tiny form of Andreas Borgia, the Lombard gold-worker, an old and well remembered acquaintance.

"I crave your pardon, most worthy seigneur," murmured Andreas, in his softest accent, in no way discovering the changed person of his once courtly acquaintance—for in times past they had oft jostled together, in the gay ante-room of Queen Isabella—"I pray you, I say, to pardon a stranger who thus abruptly obtrudes himself upon your repose, and have

further to beg that you will give him, if you can, the information he requires."

"Thou dost seldom withhold any required information thyself, through dishonesty or churlishness," said Sir Johan, with marked blunt emphasis, "else wouldst thou not dare thus frankly to challenge information of any other."

"There can be little known to an humble man such as I am, that in the relation might pleasure or serve you," answered the somewhat surprised Andreas, "yet as far as my poor knowledge goes I pray you to tax and prove my willingness, Sir Knight."

"Hum! and may be so I shall, presently," was the tart reply to this civil offer; "but first to thy wish—how may I stead thee? of what dost thou seek to be informed?"

"Briefly, then, I seek to know if that be true I hear, that the King hath quitted Sluys, with his court? and if this be so, I would further ask—can you tell me whither he is gone? since I seek in haste to have word with one who is very near the royal person."

“Nay, I have in this learned news of thee that comest to seek it,” returned the Knight; “marry, the King’s having quitted Sluys was a movement wholly unknown to me ! where gathered thou these strange tidings, which I can scarcely think by any possibility may prove true ?”

“I had the news of one who left Sluys full early on this very morn,” answered Borgià, “and who reported also wild tales of a great rising near that place, of a sudden arming amongst the knights there, and of the King himself being already in motion ; which rumours, to deal openly with you, Sir Knight, have put me in great fear and perturbation, for I travel not alone, but have those with me whose sex renders them unfit to encounter such angry and disjointed times as it appears we have unwittingly fallen on here.”

“Hem ! are ye not from England ?” coolly demanded the Knight.

“We are, fair sir.”

“ And bound straightway for the King's presence, saidst thou ? ”

“ Alas ! no, seigneur,” meekly answered Andreas, shrinking from this brusque enquiry, “ what could call a poor man like me into the presence of so great a Prince as Edward of England ? No, seigneur, I seek only to have some few words with a young nephew of mine, who is about his Grace's person, having tidings for his ear which nearly concern him ; the which I am desirous quickly to make known, if we may find means to reach him with safety.”

“ Ha, ha, ha ! marry, heaven save us, but thou dost lie with a rare ease and grace,” here cried Maltravers, at the same time bursting into a fit of loud, cold laughter.

“ What says the seigneur ? ” humbly muttered Andreas, half frozen by the tone of the Knight, and this abrupt impeachment, at the same time inwardly repenting ever having sought the presence of one whose caustic

words and piercing looks filled him with wonder and embarrassment, not to say actual alarm.

“I say,” coolly answered Sir Johan, “’tis strange to find thee without some errand to the King, since I mind the time when that visage of thine was as well known as the smiling face of any born court knight in the chambers of royalty. Eh? was it not so, old Messer Borgia?”

The surprise of the nervous little gold-worker was great at these words of the Knight, although there was, in reality, little strange in this recognition of his person; after sundry efforts, however, he contrived to muster up a smile to his relief, and, in a tone meant to be easy and joyous than otherwise, made answer—

“Then, as I am happily known to the seigneur, although I mind not his features, mine eyes, indeed, being somewhat dimm’d by age and the salt rheum of the sea we cross-

ed but yesterday, I may the bolder crave his kind help on my journey."

"Who is he thou seekest?" returned Sir Johan, "let me fairly and honestly know so much; it is in my power, perchance, to save thee the labour of any additional travel."

"Why, in truth then," cautiously proceeded Andreas, flinching a little from the fixed glance of his questioner, "I am desirous at the soonest, but with as little stir as may be—for I would not that the King should fancy I seek to come between my kinsman and his duties—to see a gentle esquire serving his Grace, one Leonard Borgia, who, being my nephew, I——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" again burst forth the Knight in the same petrifying tone, rivetting, at the same time, his hawk-like glance upon the terrified old man, "Why, thou art sworn to lie, methinks, old Andreas."

"The seigneur is pleased to be pleasant with his servant," hesitatingly murmured Borgia,

again wincing painfully under the fixed stare of his tormentor, whose every word and tone seemed now to conjure new wonder into the bilious eye and shrivelled visage of the gold-worker.

“Aye, these be merry days we meet in,” composedly said the unmoved Knight, adding, with a direct bluntness of question, which completed the confusion of the poor old man, “and who be these women in your worship’s grave company?”

“Two proper dames, and honest, I promise you,” answered Andreas, unable, though sore vexed, to reject the right of the questioner, whose penetrating look seemed to read each movement of his heart—“they are two kinswomen of mine, who seek——”

“Seek the devil, old quibbler,” here growled the questioner, in the tone of a prycked lion, “wilt thou never come to the truth? here is the third bare lie thou hast sought to pawn off on me during the space of as many minutes; hast thou no shame, to offer so barefaced a juggle to a sober, even-witted man?”

The very extreme of awe and wonder was now plainly to be read in the close-shut lips, staring eyes, and the uneasy wriggle by which he sought to evade the unwinking fascination of that look; like a spell, he had felt it rivetted upon his face from the moment of his entrance into the apartment, out of which he would now freely have paid a thousand florins to have been suddenly and safely transported, feeling helplessly overthrown by this last unmitigated impeachment of his candour.

“Well, Messer Andreas, art thou prepared with as ready and as veritable a reply to my next question?” asked the impenetrable man, after a short pause.

“Your pardon,” humbly stammered forth Andreas, after a painful contortion of his parched and almost rigid lips, “I—I pray your patience, but, I would ask, wherefore——”

“Ho, ho!” exclaimed the Knight, “now thou wouldst question me—ha? but, come, try thy hand at that, and mark, for thy example, my

plain answers ; come, begin, my life on't thou shalt at once own me for the honester witness."

"Far be it from my thoughts to question one so noble and honourable, only in so much as relates to myself," returned Andreas, gathering back a little courage, "yet, with your leave, I would ask wherefore the seigneur doubts my word at every turn."

"Because I well know there is no truth in it," bluntly replied the Knight. "Is that an answer? because I have lies of thine recorded in my memory of thirteen years standing ; in addition to which, I know that most of what thou hast this night said is as false as was the tale thou didst forge to deceive the Brussells Jew, Benjamin Periarra, in answer to some questions put by him to thee on the behalf of a banished baron of England."

On hearing the name of the Jew alluded to, the old gold-worker, as if struck by an electric shock, fell upon his knees on the spot

where he had hitherto stood, and thence, with trembling, uplifted hands, bent an imploring look upon his stern accuser, exclaiming with involuntary emotion—

“ Pardon, pardon, my lord, pardon ! for either a being of another world, or one I ought well to remember, sits here in judgment upon me.”

“ That is to say,” cried the Knight, in the same unimpassioned but strikingly peculiar tone of voice, “ thou dost at length surmise that either the devil or Johan de Maltravers now sits before thee—ha ! old equivocater ?”

“ It is then even as I guess !” breathlessly exclaimed Andreas.

“ Why, thou wilt not be far out if thou guessest there is a spice of both those haut personages seated here ; so, now we are again known to each other, answer—what, in the serpent’s name tempted thee to practise such perverse, faithless guile as to deny the very existence of that boy ?”

“Nay, but, my lord,” returned Andreas, again hesitating, “let me ask, how know you that——”

“Ha, ha, ha !” broke in Sir Johan, “what, thou wouldst again glean thy dried up brain for a fresh coinage ; dare not to offer it, old man—I have seen that boy.”

“Jesu !—seen him !” ejaculated Andreas.

“Aye, seen him ! spoke with him, struck beside him ! watched his unblanched cheek in the minute of expected death, caught the lightning of his eye in the press of battle, and seek no confirmation from lips of thine to assure me that I recognized the son of my friend, in him thou hast presumed to send forth to the world as a kinsman of thine, forsooth !”

“There can be small shame to any, in being known as the nephew of an honest merchant,” retorted Andreas, with more of his natural sharpness than he had hitherto ventured to assume, roused by the scornful delivery of this last sentence, on a subject too, so near his heart.

“What!” cried the Knight, with cold, cutting contempt. “Is’t no shame to yoke the high blooded colt with oxen, and set him to turn a tanner’s bark wheel for life?—Is’t no shame to veil the eyes of the caglet, in order to make him content to herd with owls? This hast thou sought to accomplish, and yet forsooth thou must prate of honesty!”

“Thou deemest thyself honest, because thou wouldst forbear with full belly to cut the throat of thy sleeping guest for his purse, and pridest thyself, being clad in furred velours, for letting pass a beggar’s gown left unwatched to dry on a hedge—but where, I ask, was thy honesty to say the boy was dead, who in an hour of extremity had been so frankly confided to thy keeping; which was it, selfishness or honesty that prompted that? What too was the feeling that held thee to rob the boy, so sacredly left to thy care, of the best portion of his birthright, the knowledge of his nobleness?”

“I’ll tell thee—thou hast desired to keep this youth as a plaything first, and in good time

to make a tinker, tailor, or some such villain of him—for that he is not now such his stars are to be thanked, not thou; and yet for all this, thou wilt prate, bonnetted, to me of thine honesty!”

Here the poor old man became utterly beaten down and spirit-broken before the voluble and cutting sarcasm of his merciless antagonist, and covering his face with his spread palms, big tears were seen to roll down his furrowed cheeks.

“I am, I feel that I am to blame,” he meekly cried, addressing in a deprecatory tone the Knight. “Yet in spirit, not so very much, as, if you will vouchsafe to hear me, I will strive to shew, Sir Johan.”

The Knight nodded carelessly. Borgia, gathering fresh recollection, in a moment went on.—“How, and in what fashion I have reared that boy, I need not say, for his gentle bearing and clerkly skill will tell that for me, but only that I have loved him, do love him better far than my own life is most certain, and it was

this great affection alone that prompted me to make him wholly mine.

“ Pardon me, my noble lord, but when your messenger so suddenly came upon me, I knew you to be a banished man, and from his lips gathered the perilous courses by which, beneath a feigned name, you sought to uphold the shadow of your ancient state—the child was young and of much promise, thriving in all learning under the care of the good Prior of St. Botolph—I was surprised and unprepared—knew not but that this strange man was commissioned to bear him for ever from me, to share a life which my fears painted so desperate and full of danger. In my sore agony I forged that tale which is my reproach and sin; making it plausibly appear to the inquirer that my charge was dead, and quickening his belief with sundry tempting reasons, which checked any exhibition of over zeal in him; but my charge being thus robbed of what appeared to me a perilous birthright, I inwardly vowed in

return to prove a true parent to him—smile not, Sir Johan, he might have been worse fathered—I sought to have him learned, that he might be gentle—I made him citizen, that he should not be pressed to serve in these foreign wars, not from a desire to turn his hands to labour for any profit of mine—but be content, Sir Johan, for my sin hath also been my punishment, and often have I had cause of late to repent my course of deceit, for the youth grew up ill contented with his estate, and latterly was filled with sickening repinings and wild desires, until by fortune loosed to follow this bloody game of war, the love for which, I confess, I would fain have razed from out his nature.—You have now heard my confession, my lord, and I beseech you, deal less hardly on me, who am already sore depressed in spirit and body; but place rather my dishonest practice, for such it surely was, to the account of my strong love, than to any baser or more sordid motive.”

“Tush, tush, man, take not this so much to heart!” said the Knight, stretching forth his

hand, in reality much moved by the simple, unaffected sorrow of poor Borgia. "I did but banter when I spoke so over roughly, nettled a little perchance by thy simple aim at again hooding me; but see now, tell me the true intent of this present errand to the boy, whom, let me caution thee, requires, just now, to be most tenderly dealt by, an thou wert but made acquaint with all."

"I do, I do know all, at least can shrewdly guess," cried the old man, "and verily joy to have here encountered you, for sore perplexed have I this day been—start not, Sir Johan, when I tell who is here with me!" Concluding this last sentence, Borgia's face became absolutely screwed into a labyrinth of wrinkles, as, drawing his seat close to the knee of the tall figure of Maltravers, he glanced narrowly round the dusky room.

"Who, who is it thou hast here?" impatiently demanded the Knight, his voice for the first time exhibiting some signs of inward emotion.

“Hearken,” cried Borgia, bending forward with singular expressiveness—Sir Johan stooped low, in turn, to receive the desired communication, when, placing his lips close to the ear of the eager listener, Borgia breathed one word there, on the hearing of which the swarthy darkness of the stout soldier’s cheek changed to marble paleness: and, turning an eye of wonder on the speaker, he exclaimed, hardly over his breath—

“Can it be possible?—the Saints, but this is most wonderful!—comes she then unattended, and alone?”

“The Ladye Agnes Beauchamp,” answered Borgia, in the same low whisper, “is her sole companion—myself and a poor knave of mine, her only escort.”

The Knight threw himself back in his chair, and, for a few minutes, folded his arms over his face, then, rising from his seat, he said—

“Borgia, thou must on the instant make known to the Ladye Agnes who ’tis thou hast

fallen in with here ; crave, also, that I may have instant speech with her. By my soul I know not what were best be done, since it is almost as dangerous now to return as to go on—certain is it, the lives of some of us hang by a thread here !—well, well, it will not be the first time I've perilled mine, to do this woman's will. But in God's name, let me quickly hear from her own lips what 'tis she aims at ; for of old I know, when passion is once stirred within her, wilful is she as the waves of ocean, and as hard to be turned from her course."

So saying, the Knight motioned the little gold-worker to lead the way ; and, tossing a hooded 'cloak over his armour, followed towards the lodging of her, whose name alone had acted so magically upon his well-ruled passion.

In a large, ill-lighted room of the Golden Falcon, during the time occupied by the past scene, were soberly lodged the two females so mysteriously alluded to by Andreas. They

were clad alike, in plain travelling gowns, having fur-lined hoods, and were without any outward sign by which they might be distinguished from ordinary *bourgeoises* on a journey, save only the gifts which they inherited from nature, of persons singularly graceful in form, and of a majestic height.

The one was seated in a low, narrow window, looking over the great square, in which were several busy groups of men assembled, apparently engaged in canvassing some matter of great interest; the other slowly paced the length of the room, only occasionally pausing, as she passed by her less active companion, during the time occupied by the following dialogue.

“ And should these reports of war prove true, are you still bent on following the movements of the King?”

“ As I was when I set forth on this rash venture, and for the same reason; these growing difficulties but serve to fever my desire—the sound of war but makes me more anxious

to behold him once, who may by the first arrow-flight be stricken down, before his mother's arms can again enfold him."

"Well, madam, I have done, and will go forward with you to the end, only I tremble to think the King may, amidst the confusion reigning here, become acquainted with your presence, in which case the true purpose of your coming cannot, with safety, be withheld from him."

"Nor shall it, Ladye Agnes. I seek not mystery or concealment after I have once clasped my youngest born to his mother's breast; nor would I thus darkly approach him, only through fear that were my purpose known, means would be found to sunder us for ever;—what care, besides, need I have for Edward's anger?—am I not already a prisoner and outcast in England?—what greater indignities can they inflict upon me?—can they punish this secrecy of mine, when no single movement can I make, unveiled, beyond the wall of Risings?

“ But the King is just and kind ; he, at least, knows his mother’s wrongs—he, at least, pities his mother’s weakness ; and I will trust his generous nature to deal fairly and advisedly towards all concerned, even if my presence does become known to him.

“ At any cost, however,” continued the speaker, in a most passionate tone, “ I shall be well repaid to strain, once again, my beautiful boy within these arms, to whisper in his ear the nobleness he has full right to claim, and which nature’s hand has stamped so plainly on his brow.

“ Oh, Ladye Agnes, truest, best friend, thou art no mother, else wouldst thou never question my resolution to go on, having such a reward in view, did thrice the threatened peril lie between my son and me.”

Ladye Agnes tenderly pressed and kissed the hand held forth to her at the close of the preceding sentence, exclaiming, in a tone of generous emotion—

“ I am, nevertheless, your tried friend, madam; you shall find that a maiden’s friendship is little less strong than a mother’s love. Have your will, dear madam, for no word of remonstrance shall you again hear from lip of mine; only come what may, I must be henceforward permitted through life to share your fortunes.”

A loud knock was here heard upon the door of the apartment, and, moving towards it, Ladye Agnes granted admittance to their protector, Andreas, whose expressive eyes gave evident notice of some moving occurrence having befallen him.

“ What hath happened to stir thee thus, good Borgia?” demanded the graceful door-opener, as the nervous Borgia lifted his pinched features upwards, to gaze through the increasing gloom upon the fair face of the questioner.

“ A strange, and, as I hope, a happy chance, have I lighted on, sweet ladye; but—”

and he raised himself on tip-toe to whisper this—"I would say a word to you, alone, ere I openly name this chance."

"Now ! What hath happened, Andreas ?" here cried the other ladye, rising from her seat, " I may surely know thy tidings, being too stoutly prepared to flinch from the hearing of any marvel ; say out, man—what hast thou heard of the King's movements, and these tumults, here ?"

" Little, in sooth, have I learned of that I sought to know," replied Andreas, " yet have I, by good fortune, encountered one you will be right glad to see, or I am much mistaken, for he brings good tidings of him we seek."

" Then wherefore hold him off ?" asked the ladye, impatiently, " good tidings are over welcome, and over needed, to call for such ceremonious prelude—who is he without ?"

" One not seen for many, many years, madam," interposed Ladye Agnes, as Borgia tremblingly whispered the name into her ear, " and whose presence, despite your boasted

resolution, you will find ill to endure with calmness."

"Thou, too, Agnes?—nay, this is trifling," reproachfully said the vexed woman, as, retiring back, to the distant window, she re-seated herself, adding, in a tone descriptive of any thing but the sentiment she professed, "well, I am patient, and must, perforce, abide your pleasure."

"Not one unnecessary moment shall you be held in suspense, believe me," said Ladye Agnes; "permit me to withdraw, and send him of whom we speak into your presence, when his own tongue will, doubtless, best proclaim his name and errand."

"Thou wilt not, then, leave me, dear Agnes?" called out the Ladye, again rising; but she to whom this appeal was made, had already quitted the room, and where she a minute before had been, close to the door, there now stood an armed man, with head uncovered, whose large dark eyes were, through the dimness of the light, the only features clearly distinguishable. At

this sight, the startled woman drew back, and, sustaining her trembling form against the table, for a moment paused to gaze upon the figure, which followed her not, but, statue-like, still rested by the entrance, having those singularly piercing eyes fixed upon her. Mustering all her courage, the Ladye at length demanded—

“What art thou that standest so ghost-like there? Speak! I say, man; what art thou?”

“Ghost, indeed, as thou art of thy former self to my eyes, that gaze with wonder on thee, Ladye; and hardly less strange or startling would one new from the grave be to thine eyes, than he who thus stands here.”

“That voice!” exclaimed the much-moved questioner. “Yet surely I am deceived: speak not longer so riddle-like; for I am armed for all surprises. Speak! Tell me, art thou not——”

“Johan de Maltravers,” added the stranger, stepping forward as he spoke, and in good time; for that Ladye, had, on the word, fallen lifeless to the ground; whence, having raised her, Sir Johan was assisted by Ladye Agnes and

Borgia, both of whom now re-entered, to restore her again to perception, the which being fully accomplished, she was, by her own desire once again left alone with him whose unlooked-for coming had so overpowered her passion-wrought frame.

The interview between these persons was long, and, according to appearances, had been in no slight degree moving; for on the reassembling of the little party, lights being produced, the Ladye's eyes were evidently swollen with weeping, whilst the haughty, stern features of the Knight wore a softer and less cold expression.

After passing a few minutes in conversation with Ladye Agnes, and having named a convenient hour for their journey to begin next day, Sir Johan respectfully took his leave, leaving the mourner to breathe her sorrows where the dearest comfort is ever to be found, into the sympathising ear of a kind woman.

CHAPTER IX.

THE following morning beheld the main body of the lancers, under Maltravers' order, in motion for Sluys; and, in half an hour after, preceding the rear guard, moved a horse litter, closely curtained, so as to exclude both the sun and dust. On one side of this humble conveyance rode Borgia's younger groom, Jocelin, hugely out of humour with his foreign travel; on the other, Maltravers himself, accompanied by the ancient gold-worker, so befurred and hooded up, that his most intimate crony, old Deb, would have hardly recognized him, al-

though the heat of the day became so oppressive to the cattle, they were glad to progress exceeding slow.

Moving thus leisurely through the rich country lying between Bruges and Sluys, it was afternoon by the time our travellers arrived under the gate of the latter place. Entering soberly within the walls, Sir Johan was greeted with many heartily expressed welcomes by the busy commander of the burgher guard on duty, who likewise was most communicative of a marvellous bloody battle that day fought before the castle of Rerefonde, wherein, as he told, the King had been cruelly worsted, by a sally made on him by the Count in person, as many here could witness who had struck therein so long that at length they had found much difficulty to escape the deadly slaughter, in order, he added, to hasten here to the defence of their own hearths, before which they were in momentary expectation of beholding the *débris* of the King's force arrive, closely pursued by the victorious Flemings, under Count-Alaine.

These were indeed strange tidings, to which Sir Johan having listened perforce, with a smile which horrified the honest burgher captain, he was allowed to proceed, on promising to hold himself in readiness to sally to the King's rescue, when he should arrive so beaten, as well as engaging to man the ramparts of the good town, should it be hostilely menaced.

As he hurriedly concluded this conversation, he was joined by the confidential servitor on whose care he had depended for all due preparations being made for the reception of the strangers he brought hither in his company : following this fellow, therefore, without stir or question, he had the satisfaction of seeing his charge comfortably bestowed in the house which had been originally assigned to him for a quarter.

Once securely lodged, the travellers next became solicitous to obtain some more consistent and better authenticated account of the contest of this morning, although the light manner in which the well-experienced Knight dealt with

the marvels of the gallant burgher, sufficiently assured them: these marvels had their rise, in fact, from the exaggerated stories told by the terrified women from the camp, backed by the loud attestations of a few also of the bold burghers themselves, who had never slackened speed from the moment when the first trumpet of Rerefonde startled them from their snug cover, until once more fairly across the ditch of their native town.

On a minute inquiry, however, it now appeared that since the coming in of these august runagates, there had arrived nothing credible in the way of a confirmation, all after rumours being but echoes of the first tale, with such slight variation as could easily be accounted for, by allowing something to time and distance.

In any case the most wary precautions had been adopted by the alarmed defenders of the fancy-threatened town; the bridges had been kept raised all day, the gates were held close shut, every outlet was barricadoed, and it was

only through the arrival of his advance having caused his coming to be expected and provided for, that Sir Johan himself found such prompt admittance.

The assurance of this addition to his garrison, together with the presence of so tried a soldier as the Knight, had wrought, however, some favourable change in the confidence of the bold commander of the place, and after a little grave consultation with his ally, he became at length so greatly heartened as to permit of a *reconnaissance* being made, in the direction of Rerefonde, by a party of the light-armed Welshmen ; and before another half hour had elapsed, Sir Johan became, by the means of his scouts, duly apprized of the near approach of the English advance.

If the Knight was somewhat anxious for full tidings of the past fray, there was one whom he encountered in his rounds, no less curious to obtain certain knowledge of the same event ; this was young Philip, yet known only as of Courtressin, who at day dawn had, by the

King's command, been escorted here, together with his young bride and her mother, both of whom continued sore afflicted, but the latter Philip described as being well nigh heart-broken through grief, and apprehension for the fate of her lord. Maltravers, on his part, was not a little surprised by the whole tenor of the youth's relation, more especially on hearing of the concluding scene of his adventure within the castle of Rerefonde, where his reception had so belied the apprehensions of his friends.

“And are ye then really wedded fast?” asked the wondering Knight, in an incredulous tone.

“Fast as ever yet were two fond hearts linked together by book, priest, and ring; and what's far before all, or either, by that mutual and free desire, without which the rest is only bestial, a mere legal mockery, founded too often in folly and weakness, to be continued in misery and repentance until dissolved in guilt, or more happily ended by death.”

“But I thought,” said the Knight, “thou

wert fast betrothed to the fair Bertha here, the late Ruward's wealthy heiress?"

"So they for years have told us daily, but certain am I that, in the whole of this time, never once has the heart of either responded to the intent of our wise guardians. I am in truth betrothed to her in all brotherly love, and to the doing of such kindness as to a dear sister a man may honestly offer; and more than this had we never become to each other, even had the Ruward himself continued alive, for his will was ever too reasonably guided to have sought to constrain to a union their persons whose hearts and spirits held no sympathy."

"Um!" ejaculated Maltravers, turning to meet one of his scouts just then approaching, "the devil moves the wheel of this boy's fortune, else could not all things so aptly jump with his desires."

The man thus arrived, brought not only a confirmation of the King's coming, but the certain intelligence of Rerefonde's death, gathered from some who had assisted in

carrying his lifeless corpse back to the house of his ancestors; the burly Father Mathieu he also described, as being the only prisoner moving in the train of the victors. This news was by Philip most sorrowfully received, for, independent of his own concern for the loss of a kinsman who had discovered so happy a road to his love, he was doubly fearful for the consequences to be apprehended to the mother of his Alzire, should she become too suddenly apprized of the Count's death. Communicating these fears to Sir Johan, he was by him advised to use a little artifice on the occasion, and so keep the last fact concealed, until time should have abated the grief of their late strange parting, and the minds of both so become strengthened to bear, without danger, the sad news of this eternal separation.

Having agreed to ride forth together, in order to meet the King, they proceeded on their way in company as far as the house of Van Heylen in close neighbourhood to which the ladies of Rerefonde were lodged; whilst

Philip, therefore, repaired to his home, to dress in the least fearful shape, the report he had concocted of Count Alaine's flight, for the ears of his wife and mother, Maltravers sought an interview with Bertha, and the kind matron-sister of the stout Van Heylen, both of whom he found most anxious to learn the latest tidings from the camp, though moved by motives somewhat different.

During this interview it became clearly manifest to the acute perception of the Knight, how beat the pulses of the younger maiden's heart; to her at least he felt assured the wedding of her betrothed was no unwelcome accident. Of the death of Sir Alaine they heard, with the pity women best know how to feel, even towards their nearest enemies, and sincerely did they sympathize in the affliction of their neighbours; Maltravers, in conclusion, made them aware of the deception intended to be put upon these already mourners, and to their prudence entrusted the task of abetting the well-meant fraud.

On being again joined by Philip, Sir Johan, from this, proceeded in the direction of his old quarter, whither he had directed the horses to be led; as they approached this house, they saw the ancient Chamberlain de Vere hastily coming forth out of the passage communicating with the entrance door. He at first took the direction to meet them, but on observing their near approach he turned short upon his heel, with the evident desire to avoid recognition or intercourse, and passed quickly away in the opposite direction.

“Mark yonder fox skulking off,” observed Maltravers to his companion, at sight of this movement: “what has the old court-fly been buzzing in my quarter for—no good, I’ll warrant, for such filthy insects touch no where but they leave some taint behind. That hoary old knave, who once called himself my fast friend, for very craven fear and envy looks with an evil jealousy on my return to the King’s grace, as though he were despoiled of his birthright through this regaining of mine;

but let him look to't, or I may yet put my hand upon his wing, and spoil his flying. Now, Hurst," he enquired, addressing one of his followers, who approached in company with the led horses, "what word brings the Lord de Vere, for he had business to lead him to my quarter, I guess, else would he have gone a mile about to have held the wind of it or me?"

"He came by command to tell you," replied Hurst, "that here is one arrived on special haste from the King, to bid you forth to meet him instantly; and further to say, that if, as he has learned, any from Ghent have ridden hither with you, such are not to appear in his presence at their peril, since he will not receive from that rebellious city any word either of excuse or submission."

"Ha, ha, ha!" cried Maltravers, laughing scornfully, "here then is the plain reason why de Vere turned on his heel to shun me. My lord the King's Chamberlain! can ill brook this errand-doing to the pardoned outlaw, though 'tis the menial's bounden service, and all he

THE KING'S SECRET.

~~was~~ ever yet found good for ; however, thou mightest have informed him that there were none come with me from Ghent likely to appear in, or offend his master's sight, towards the which let us move as quickly as we may ; I only wish my news were less heavy."

"I know not how I myself may stand in the King's sight," cried Philip, mounting his horse ; "but hope the cloud of his displeasure will by this time have passed away, since, faith, he looked but darkly upon me the night Sir William Whitehorse led me to his tent, and he learned there that I was indeed the wedded husband of Count Alaine's daughter. However, come the worst, we can, I thank heaven, live without the smiles of any king, although I regard the noble Edward enough to make me desirous honestly to win his favour."

Attended by a few followers they sallied forth on the road leading for Rerefonde, leaving the joyful towns-folk—for, by this time, all were aware of the royal approach—busily employed in preparing for the King's reception,

or rather for the welcome of the more valiant portion of the burgher guard, to whose prowess these good gossips had already ascribed the victory of this day.

The riders first fell in with the King's laquais and sumpter cattle, hurrying homeward to make ready all for their master's fit reception, as well as to prepare for a high supper which the sovereign had declared his intention of giving at night, in honour of the noble esquires and others, who had so well stricken their maiden blow in the hot affair of morning.

The roads soon presented a bustling and cheerful scene; for from every side the country people had by this time crowded in to swell the royal progress, bringing with them all kinds of tempting refreshments for such as possessed the means of purchase, together with horses and various vehicles to assist the transport of the wounded and the carriage of the various *materiel* necessarily attendant upon the movement of any warlike force; however small.

The evening was extremely clear and fine, the way too was become hardened beneath the influence of two sunny days, so that in the best possible trim, and, therefore, in a happy mood, did the gallant Edward make his present approach towards Sluys ; he came easily mounted upon a short-legged, ambling hobbeler, and was still clad in his armour, but wore a turban of samit upon his head, in the place of basinet or cervelliere; about his person rode de Mowbray, the leader of this expedition, Beauchamp, Seagrave, Ughtred, Konigsfoorde, and many Flemish nobles, with all of whom he cheerfully conversed, until, casting his eyes upon Maltravers and his companions, where they were drawn up by the wayside awaiting his notice, he immediately put spur to his palfrey and pressed forward to join them, when, first addressing Philip, he said, with some coldness, but in a manner most marked and observable—

“ Be not thou over cast down, young sir, for the death of Rerefonde, since, by our Ladye, *thou* of all men hast least cause to la-

ment *his* end. At no great distance of time thou shalt learn wherefore I say this, meanwhile be assured of our favour when thou seekest to win it, and think not more of our somewhat discourteous bearing towards thy young bride, whom, indeed, we truly pity ; for this match was even more ill-advised than either of ye are yet aware of, from the consequences of which, however, we doubt not, by breaking this hasty bond, to set ye free.”

Confused and startled by this last observation of the King, Philip was yet hesitating how best to reply, when, waving him gently off, Edward fell into instant converse with Sir Johan, from whose lips, as they rode forward together, the monarch received a circumstantial detail of the last moments of his great friend, together with a knowledge of the packet relative to Philip, entrusted to his keeping by Artevelde the minute before his murder. Of the excuses for this deed, and the popular excesses attendant upon it, humbly proffered by the authorities of Ghent, Edward would

hear no word, but more than once loudly swore yet to make that city rue the bloody doings, which, as he sorrowfully said, had robbed him of his worthiest supporter.

Being in his turn dismissed, Maltravers retired rearward, falling in, soon after, with a younger group, amongst whom he distinguished Leonard, bearing, as was his duty, the helmet of his master. The greeting of the youth was hearty and sincere; for, notwithstanding the caustic humour of the Knight, the young esquire felt the interest he took in his welfare to be real, and in return regarded his senior friend with both respect and gratitude.

Reining, at the request of Maltravers, a little apart, the surprise and joy of Leonard were great indeed, when he was informed of the arrival of his aged uncle, whilst, with perchance keener delight, though not so openly expressed, did he listen to Sir Johan's sly relation of his recent interview with Bertha, and of the favourable conclusions gathered by the

Knight from her bearing, any construction of whose was the more cheering, since the lover well knew his self-constituted confidant was at least no flatterer.

“My fate, I am free to confess, Sir Johan,” said the delighted Borgia, moved in the joy of his heart to less reserve than he had ever yet indulged in, “my life’s happiness depends on that maid alone; but I have manly patience, and only require a little hope to enable me reasonably to endure the long probation I must pass before I can make me worthy openly and without doing her shame to approach her love.”

“My word for it,” replied the Knight, with a touch of his old tone, “the maid will not let you grow grey through the length of your servitude.”

“How! mysterious ever, Sir Johan,” cried Leonard, smiling, “you will yet play prophet with me.”

“Well,” retorted the Knight, “you have not, methinks, found me so far wrong as to be led to despise or disregard my predictions,

and now mark me when I tell you that before many hours the very crisis of your fate will be most likely past, and the colour of your whole after-life decided. . Now fare ye well for a while," added the speaker; " old Borgia will be at thy lodging by that time thou art well arrived there ; credit fully all he may then, and there disclose, and, in the interim, prepare thine cars for passing marvels."

A moment after, Sir Johan was at some distance pushing on towards the advance, while our hero, half pleased, half startled at the oracular manner of his singular monitor, continued leisurely to pace onward in the position he at present occupied, which was at some distance from his own proper place in the line, where rode together the esquires of the King.

Had he but guessed at the pain this little accident caused to one who, amongst the many, watched the slow passage of the royal train, as, amidst the boisterous greetings of the populace, it proudly defiled across the grand square, how quickly would he have spur-

red into his place ; but, alas ! how might he divine that his fair mistress, from her narrow window, carefully scanned every passing form and face, until she sickened for very apprehension, to note one absent she had counted to behold there ; when in his turn Leonard came opposite the house, the searching and quick eye of affection at once detected the window pane against which the lovely cheek of the watchful maid was pressed—but towards him it turned not ; no, still her eyes were strained to follow the advance where rode the glittering train of the King : a chill was creeping round the lover's heart as, apprehensively, his jealous mind suggested—"upon what favoured form are her eyes thus rivetted ?" But even as the dark suspicion came, the glance of those eyes fell suddenly upon his upturned face—he beheld the flash of glad recognition, the irrepressible glow of joyful surprise which, like a passing sun-burst, beamed on the maiden's brow as she vanished from her discovered lurking place, and his soul was again unclouded, his

heart once more reassured, although he saw only this, no more, for the bright look described was, in fact, far briefer than words may paint it.

The monarch having once more passed on board his floating palace, and his attendant esquires having completed their duties, they were for a time dismissed, and when thus set free, Leonard hastened home to his own quarter, avowedly to prepare for the coming banquet, but in reality more filled with the joy of having to welcome his kind old relative, than occupied by the thought of the high honour of feasting with his sovereign.

“He is come, by Gog, Leonard, the old boy is come to fetch thee home, I reckon !” laughingly said Hawkwood, as he was encountered by Leonard near to the house out of which he was issuing, with a basket beneath his arm.

“I’m right glad to hear it,” replied Leonard smiling ; “but what plunder hast thou here, Gilbert ?”

“Only the emptying of thy store of drink, Len,” coolly answered Hawkwood, producing

a stone jug of Bordeaux, part of the store brought by Cyril, of the possession of which he was ignorant till now ; “ I should ha’ told thee of it, as I have already done Cy, who was churl enough to belie thee, and say I should not have the wine.”

“ Take it and welcome, Gilbert, so thou wilt not turn it to any over riotous end.” -

“ I’ll turn it down one of the honestest, and thirstiest throttles ever Bordeaux bubbled over !” said the laughing knave—“ ’tis for the priest prisoner, Sir Mathieu, who is confined in the guard room at the great gate, dry and dismal, full of woe, and without wine—either being perilous evils for a man of his size to bear ; so thanks, Len, and fare thee well, for I must go comfort the poor soul.”

“ And hark thee, Gilbert, ere thou proceedest to comfort thyself over much in thy charity, go to Van Heylen’s, and inform his sister thou wert by me sent to say, if the Heer, who marcheth on foot, be not then arrived at home,

that he is well and unhurt, and must doubtless soon be here."

"No other message to that house?" slyly asked Gilbert, whose wit was already indebted for a rouse to his sympathy with the drouthy sorrow of Father Mathieu; and before Leonard could reply, Cyril ran forth to say his uncle wearied to see him, being within hearing of his voice.

"Await me, does he?" exclaimed Leonard mounting hastily the narrow stair leading to his lodging, over the head of which stair he perceived the pinched face of Andreas anxiously protruded; in the next moment he was before him, encompassed by the arms of the affectionate old artist, who, half choaked by tears of gladness, yet sought to give vent to the ardent and voluble expressions of delight his warm heart suggested, holding for a time his smiling kinsman a pleased listener only.

CHAPTER X.

“ My ever good uncle !” cried Leonard, as the passionate old man subsided into a condition of comparative tranquillity, and he in turn became enabled to advance a word, “ I looked not so soon for your doing me this favour, in addition to the many I already owe to your love.”

“ Alas, alas !” sighed Andreas, looking wistfully into the glowing face of the speaker, “ I come not hither so fast to do thee any favour, but only that tardy justice too long withheld

from thee by my selfish fears, and surely also, in some sort, by my great love.”

Again mournful tears unrestrainedly flowed down Borgia's deeply wrinkled cheeks, and it became for a time a vain attempt in Leonard to seek to assuage his grief, or with words of comfort allay the strong emotion, which was perfectly inexplicable to the youth ; to all his endearments, lavished to this effect, Andreas answered only by new reproaches upon himself, together with many incoherent demands of forgiveness, prayed of the wonder-struck Leonard. After some time, however, the violence of his passion by slow degrees once more subsided, and being in a measure restored to composure by a silence of some minutes' continuance, he impressively desired Leonard to close to the door, having, as it appeared, at length nerved himself for the disclosure which he had come, though painfully agitated, fully resolved to make.

“ Be not so moved, dear sir,” said Leonard,

after obeying his desire, observing that the old man had sunk his head upon his knees, and there continued for a time to rest it. "What can you have to declare to me, who owe my all to your kindness; not only my past happiness, but also my present condition; you may surely, sir, say aught to me, your poor nephew and servant."

"Call not thyself longer so," hurriedly broke forth Andreas, lifting his head to look tremblingly into the face bent over him, "call not thyself Borgia, or my nephew, or servant, it is my present shame that thou wert ever so called or bound, and hath been too long thy discredit, for which I know, when I have confessed all my folly, thou wilt surely look coldly on me, and so kill me."

"Nay, for mercy, calm ye, sir," cried Leonard, becoming, on his part, somewhat agitated by the more particular nature of these oft repeated allusions; "whatever you may think fitting to disclose for your own quiet, believe not me, I pray you, so forgetful, so worthless,

as to imagine that all signs of gratitude may be so promptly sponged from my memory, or that, knowing as I do, the integrity of your very nature, your wisdom and great worth, I can ever cease to think, with pride, of having been allowed to bear your name, and claim your kin, which I love too well to be even now compelled, without good reason, to surrender for any other."

The cheerful, hearty air with which these few words were given, and the evident sincerity waiting on their delivery, produced a great and cheering effect upon the borne-down courage of the sensitive Italian; with a more assured look he scanned the generous expression mantling over the handsome face of his comforter—then fondly pressing the hand of the youth to his breast, he exclaimed—

"My blessing, my blessing be thrice doubled upon thy head for that speech, my son; for though the time is come when I must needs lose my nephew, and forfeit all claim to a relationship to which I never held any just title,

yet wilt thou be the *son* of the poor old *Orefice*, the child of his heart, and as such thou wilt still allow me, whilst I live, to address thee— wilt thou not, *Leonardo*? Say thou wilt, and I will endeavour to muster courage for the tale of my own roguery, as well as of the wrong I have done thee through my foolish fondness; for heaven is my judge, and will, I pray, deal with me if I meant not thy good, and never thy injury in my subtilty.”

“Why will you yet talk of injuries to one who has no memory, only for the benefits which, open handed, have, by you, been ever heaped upon him,” returned *Leonard*; “but let us, dear uncle, now break off this matter that so moves you, for this time at least, and turn to things more cheering; I am not so curiosity-bitten as to desire you should suffer further in the instant relation of this secret, whatever it be, and which I look for with less impatience, since I learn the knowledge of it must rob me of your name and relationship.”

“Nay, not so—it must not be so, my noble son,” answered Andreas, gradually keeping the curb on his temper, under the encouragement of Leonard’s unchanged and duteous expressions.

“Here must not, shall not be any longer delay; in truth it rests not longer with me, nor is dependant now upon will of mine. I must perforce proceed; the very hour is come, and the will of her whom I obey in this, once fixed, may not readily be turned: so sit by me, and pay attention, whilst I in a plain way relate the story of our first meeting, which was no less wonderful than have been the various means by which it hath pleased the saints again to restore thee to thy true kin, and proper station—heaven make it the happier as well as the higher.”

Leonard did as directed, without more comment, for, if truth be told, he felt very strongly moved with desire to hear this secret, for which he had been so long and so mysteriously prepared. When he had quietly seated him-

self before Andreas, the latter, in a low and often-times broken, yet perfectly intelligible voice, delivered himself as follows—

“It is now many years ago, that, in this very month of June, I went to Nottingham, with some rare jewels for the Queen Isabella, the which she fancied to wear at a tourney, proclaimed to be holden there by the great Lord Roger Mortimer and the young King, so soon as the parliament, there sitting, should be dismissed.

“Well, having delivered and fitted on my wares, and heard them well approved by the court dames, as well as by my royal and beautiful mistress, I turned again, well pleased, towards London; the first night, I mind me, I slept within some twenty miles of Nottingham, at—I forget what place, but, indeed, it matters not, being resolute to travel only by such short journies as were suited to the capacity of my cattle, my own years, and humour. Well, in obedience to this, on the next day I rose some hours before the sun, resolving to end my travel

before the mid-day heat should raise the dust, which I saw sore galled the nostrils of my poor beast, to say nothing of the pain I endured in my own eyes from the same cause ; assisted by a trusty countryman of mine own, named Cire Perotte, my preparations were soon made, and forth we sallied from the Ostle, where we had passed the night; whilst we together thus peaceably ambled along the dusky path, for the trees were many, and all now decked with their thickest foliage, besides that the fogs of morning yet lay heavy on the land, or flitted before the growing day like smoke clouds from tree to tree—suddenly from a shady forest path on our left hand was plainly heard the sound of hurrying horses' feet, and just as we passed the lane, forth issued two cavaliers, covered with dust, and seemingly sore spent with their hasty travel.

“The horse of the foremost was clearly of the kind I have so oft chidden thee, vainly, for riding, being full of hot blood, and of untameable mettle, and at a rare pace the rider of this

beast prycked by us, without deigning to exchange word of greeting, or kind courtesy, as is usual amongst most honest wayfarers : the second brute was, however, of another sort, and shewed no such alacrity at passing, without halt or breath, the sober-looking nags we rode, the which, I take it, he found more near akin to his liking than the wild horse whose hot company he had striven in vain to keep.

“ In vain-did the chafed rider try both whip and spur, till foot and hand failed, the patient beast moved no jot the faster, but quietly enduring the storm, jogged soberly forward on the same level as my old hobbeler, as deaf to oaths as he had proved insensible to lash and iron.

“ The shouts of the vexed man at last warned his flightier companion of his sad plight, for such his words implied he thought it ; and suddenly back, flying, came the foremost cavalier, who, being thus suddenly fronted by, I instantly recognized, as he did me, and mutual salutation and words of civility now passed between us.

“ ‘ How is’t, man? art foundered quite, Thornden?’ demanded the returned rider.

“ ‘ He hath no better pace left in him, my lord,’ answered the weary man, pointing to the reasonable rate at which the poor willing brute was journeying on : with this, without more ado, the knightly cavalier besought me to alight, and step one minute aside with him, when, in a hurried way, he told me his life depended solely on the speed he now used, adding how unwilling he was to leave his faithful follower behind, to fall into the hands of angry enemies, and ending with a request that I would give in exchange for this spent horse, the one on whose back honest Cire was mounted.

This, be sure, I readily consented to do ; for setting aside the desire I naturally felt to serve, in such extremity, one that was known to me, I likewise guessed that a bold and desperate man would not twice think about taking that by force he needed for his life’s safety, after perchance braining me for venturing to say him nay.

“ I in one moment, however, surmised that the Knight did not mean to end with this simple opening matter ; for, after standing for a small time, like one only half resolved, he violently wrung my hand, muttering, ‘ a moment more, kind Borgia,’—for, as I said, I was well known to him ; and, passing with this, he went up hastily to his attendant, who had not yet alighted from the worn horse, whilst my poor Cîre gazed stupidly on, utterly unable to comprehend what parley was going on between his master and these strangers.

“ I was yet inwardly marvelling from what cause the Knight’s trouble could have arisen, and how this odd meeting would end, when I beheld the horseman, after a word from the Knight, quietly throw aside the ample cloak which hung from his neck down to his heel, and deliver into the hands of his master a fair boy, that lay packed carefully in a long basket, strapped on a pad before him. Judge my wonder when, placing this strange burthen before me on the ground, the Knight hurriedly said,

as well as at this distant time I may remember—and no word of that hour but has often since been recalled to my memory.

“ ‘ Master Borgia,’ he said, ‘ look on this poor wearied boy ; all night have we ridden with him from near Nottingham hither, and a sore journey hath it proved to the child, as well as a heavy impediment to us who fly for very life ; here is no time to tell all that hath passed ; too soon will it reach thy hearing—but only this—I well know thee for an honest man ; I judge thee by nature, a kind one : take thou this boy to thy care awhile, for very pity, and say no word of aught that has passed here this morning.’

“ ‘ Of the child hereafter,’ he added, ‘ thou shalt know all that is needful ; for the present, take this ring ; it was given me by his noble father ; if I live and thrive, I will, in due time, claim thy charge by this token—if we meet not again, give it to his keeping, when he shall have reached the years of manhood : and now, farewell !’

“ Had I been inclined to object to this hasty charge, there was no opportunity; for the Knight’s follower had already exchanged horses, according to my first bidding, with the amazed Cire, and was now by his master’s side. I uttered not, however, if I mind me rightly, one word, but, holding my beast by the head, stood gazing on the thing lying at my foot with stupid bewilderment, and, perchance, some touch of fear.

“ ‘ Turn thou not off the road, honest Borgia,’ cried the Knight, as he sprung into his saddle; ‘ and, remember! that boy is a kinsman of thine own, until he is claimed by me.’

“ This was the last word of the Knight. Away he spurred, like a whirlwind, and after his heels close bounded Cire’s horse, with whisking of tail and a nimble clatter of hoof, such as I had never before beheld the animal exhibit, nor could have believed her devil enough to indulge in, on less evidence than mine own eyes.”

“ And who, sir, was this knight so hard beset ?” here interrupted Leonard, who had hitherto sat, a breathless listener to the old man’s prolix narrative. Andreas nodded his head, and, after his own fashion, went on—

“ Well, for a few minutes I sat me down thoughtfully by the wayside; next calling my countryman, Cire, to me, I honestly told him of my perplexity as to the means of bestowing this cumbrous charge, towards which my heart yet remained close sealed.

“ ‘ You never owned children,’ said the kind-souled Cire. ‘ I once did ; but those that called me father, are all gone. If this poor child be troublesome in your eyes, give him to me, and I will tend him freely.’

“ Mark !—even as he spoke the first soft ray of the morning sun fell upon the uncovered face of the innocent sleeper, when, rubbing its little fingers in its vexed eyes, it opened them laughingly upon me : my heart was at once unlocked with that look ; I felt a new emotion

rise up within me, and, kissing the rosy lips of the smiling thing lying by my side, I swore to deal kindly by it.

“Need I say, Leonardo, thou wert that helpless baby!” here broke forth the old man, at length overpowered by these recollections, and casting his arms about the neck of the gallant looking fellow by his side.

“And to the uttermost has the voluntary pledge of that hour been redeemed, as my full heart can witness,” replied Leonard, warmly returning the old man’s embrace, who, interrupting this burst of gratitude, continued hastily, and with great nervous irritation—

“Say not over much yet, Leonardo, for what follows of my tale may give thee cause justly to feel wrathfully towards me.

“At the next cottage I left thee under the care of Cire, and rode, without question, home to learn of the great change that had taken place at Nottingham, on the very night before thou wert confided to my care.

“The power of Mortimer was overthrown,

the regency dissolved, and our present noble Edward proclaimed sole governor of his realm. Ah, me ! heavy penalties had many to pay for this turn of the changeling fortune ; my mistress, the Queen, was shut out from the world, and left a mark for all foul tongues to dart their venom at ; her great wrongs were, seemingly, at once forgotten, and only her folly and woman's weakness remembered. Mortimer, soon after, lost his head, and many of his friends, who had fled across the seas, were defended from ever more revisiting their native land.

“ In a little space, nevertheless, all was again quiet, the past was slurred over by the cunning finger of time, and many years rolled on without my once hearing word of him from whose hand I had received thee ; but many rumours of his sudden death did reach me, which event I, in consequence, at length, counted so fully on, that when, some four years past, there came a certain Jew of Brussels, with due authority, to question me of my charge in the name of the banished baron, I,

unhesitatingly, coined a lie, swearing the boy he sought had for years been dead. I found means also to make the fellow satisfied of my truth in this, and we parted.

“ But the saints punished my selfish falsehood, for, from that hour, my joy hath been less in thee, my apprehensions much increased. I never after saw thee go forth but I feared some chance might lead to my detection ; more than once did I resolve to reveal all I knew to thee, but again was withheld through dread of thy bold spirit, for well I knew no after argument of mine would keep thee from the field once thou wert assured of thy claim to gentle place there.

“ And now, Leonardo, before I hear the word of forgiveness I feel assured of by thy look of kindness, prepare thine car for the greatest wonder of this hour. Here is one bidding without who will, in proper season, conduct thee to her from whose lips only must thou learn the secret of thy birth ; for by me

no more is known than what thou hast already heard."

"Is it possible!" exclaimed Leonard, springing transportedly up, "am I so near my happiness? Oh, sir, bless you for these words, this hour is dearer far to my heart than tongue can tell—not for the vain boast of birth alone do you behold this bursting joy of mine, oh, no! I have higher, more generous reasons for hailing this promised change of condition, for more than my happiness, I dare to hope, is won by it—may I not now at once and openly approach her? may I not bravely avow that he who dared, as the simple pageant knight, to raise his hopes so high, is proud, as the noble, more loudly to proclaim his love? Let us lose no time, dear sir—who is he that waits to bring me to this knowledge? Come, let us quickly seek him."

"He already is with us here, my son," cried Andreas, "behold him in Sir Johan de Mal-

travers, from whose hands it was I first received thee, together with that signet ring, which, under heaven's guidance, has led to so much happiness."

It was not without some pains-taking that Sir Johan was now enabled to tranquillize Leonard sufficiently to induce him to make due preparation for the King's banquet, from which the Knight pledged himself, in good time, to conduct him to her presence whose words alone could fully solve the mystery of his strange fate ; he, at length, however, patiently yielded himself to the discretion of his first friend, but overwhelming were the feelings which, from this time, shook the soul of Leonard as he counted the minutes which must elapse before this discovery might yet be made complete.

The old man's sorrow was the only effectual check upon the youth's impatience ; and in endeavouring to quiet his uncle's vexation, for so he still insisted on calling him, Leonard half forgot his own.

Hawkwood, during this time, was charitably

engaged soothing the sorrows of the imprisoned Mathieu, until having by wholesome argument and a due admixture of Bordeaux, at length managed to steep his senses in sweet oblivion, he next betook him to Van Heylen's house, at which his rescue of the master had made him a most welcome guest.

Having delivered his errand, he prepared to make a marvellous deal of the past fight, and of his master's prowess, for so he now styled Leonard, having made up his own mind to consider him as such, without once thinking the consent of the principal at all a necessary point of the agreement.

Gilbert at once, with native tact for observation, discovered that his subject was well chosen, and welcome to the ears of his soft auditors, and his details became in consequence proportionably minute, till it was only when he conjectured that the banquet would be probably over, and the leavings disposed of, that, full of wine and all the good things a welcome messenger could be loaded with,

he quitted this place, impatient to disburthen his wit of the heap of surmises crowded into it, before Leonard went to rest.

For this kindly purpose he first sought his master's quarters, and finding that he was not yet returned, made straightway for the quay, close alongside of which the Royal Catherine lay moored, easily distinguishable at this hour by the blaze of innumerable lights surrounding her hull, hanging pendant from the ends of her yards, and twinkling like stars from the summits of her tall masts, as well as by the frequent loud bursts of music, together with other sounds of high revelry, echoing from her decks.

CHAPTER XI.

THE great cabin of the Catherine, of whose size and grandeur wonders might be told, without overspanning the limits of truth, was on the present solemn occasion, crowded with all the noble and gentle who could on such short summons be convened together, the King in his own person presiding, and playing host with that even courtesy which best divests men's spirits of the envious feeling with which authority is too generally regarded, making greatness inwardly beloved, as well as outwardly revered; none knew how best

this spirit might be at such times inspired in those about him than the third Edward ; and on this occasion, at a late hour of the night, he yet sat, cheerfully dispensing his favours to all who had stood by him on this day, making doubly grateful to the senses, by his presence, the great store of excellent cheer provided for his guests.

Thus was the time beguiled, so that none marked its flight, up to the gayest hour of the revel—ever the shortest as it is the best—that precise point when all things look brightest at the festive board, when the spirit of the grape has tuned men's minds to high excitement, without having wholly taken the rein from reason's hand, or clothed as yet the human face divine in the mask of the drunken satyr.

Just, then, at this inspiring hour it was, that the Chamberlain, whose active duty permitted him to pass in or out without much note, was seen somewhat hurriedly to approach his master, and mutter some close whisper in his ear ;

the action itself might have passed off without giving rise to remark or remembrance, had not the instantly changed manner of the King necessarily attracted to himself the eyes and ears of all present.

The mirth of the meeting subsided beneath the influence of the marked change in the royal barometer of present feeling ; the gayest and loudest tongues became mute ; the most sparkling eyes looked grave, and many a ruddy cheek suddenly paled as the rich colour was seen to depart from the cheek of the King.

Having heard this seemingly ominous communication of de Vere, the blue eye of Edward ranged with fierce enquiry amongst the assembled throng—and many bold ones here then drew short breath, as their eyes quailed beneath a scrutiny they knew their hearts ill able to endure.

“ They are not present, ’tis certain ! ” exclaimed the monarch, unconsciously loud ; then turning his look upon the unmoved features of the aged courtier, he added, with an

air of increased perplexity and wonder, "yet, de Vere, art thou mad, so boldly to assert this? I tell thee, man, it *cannot* be—she is not, may not in nature be so damned a wanton! Thou art misled in this, old Lord; come, come, confess it is not certain!"

"If I may yet put trust in mine eyes and ears, Sire, then is it, I repeat, even as I have asserted."

"Thine eyes and ears are age-worn—they are grown dim and dull both, and ought not so boldly to be vouched for, or over freely trusted. Old man, I say, be thou wary, for scarcely will I credit mine own younger and fresher senses in such an utterly unbelievable matter: but come, lead me to where thou sayest I may see the arch fiend in this disguise, for it can be none other!"

With this, the King started from his place—a movement as hastily imitated by every one present; for although the passionate words here recorded did not reach the hearing of many of the assembled persons, yet was the

great agitation of the sovereign, together with the death-like pallor usurping the natural glow of his complexion, apparent to the whole board, and great was the correspondent sympathy felt by the guests and lookers on of every degree. The bustle of this general hasty rising recalled, however, the attention of Edward to those before him, and bending, for a moment, his look around, he raised his hand to motion silence, when, upon the signal being understood and obeyed, he called out in a deep but tolerably composed voice—

“ Sit, messieurs, I charge you ; heed not our absence, which is occasioned by a matter personal wholly to us, and affecting none other here ; meantime, I lay it on all present to abide patiently my return, in no way suffering this interruption to mar the pleasure of my guests, to whom be all joy, during the brief time of our absence : sit, all, again we say, and stir no man hence, as he would avoid our reproach ; so, for a while, sirs, by your fair leave, all ! ”

In obedience to this command, each man once more adjusted him to his proper place, but with less of ease did many present endure this second sitting; strange whispers flew about, anxious looks were passed, couriers of apprehension, from distant associates, and places were exchanged to draw together severed friends, who were seen with mingling beards, muttering their mutual fears and surmises; some there were who, naturally of lighter temperament, or, having less politic heads than their neighbours, or hearts of sounder stuff, cared but little, and feared none—and these manfully, by a more frequent recurrence to the wine cup, sought to chase away this pestilent gloom, and inspire others with some touch of their own buoyant and heart-whole humour: but these well meant efforts were in no commensurate degree successful, and the mindful looker on might discover, that although the bursts of noisy merriment grew gradually louder, still did the gloom on the brows of many become gradually darker

in exact proportion as their forced exertions to dissipate it grew more boisterous.

Dropping a veil over the changed aspect this revel had put on before the beclouded brow of the royal donor of the feast ; it is necessary to leave this scene in company with the King, and henceforth, courtier like, attend the steps of greatness.

On quitting the cabin, Edward exchanged a few words with de Vere, who hastily went on deck, whither, after carefully enveloping his person in a plain loose gown and drawing the hood quite over his head, the monarch followed, and on being informed " all was ready," immediately stepped from the ship and hurried silently onward guided by the eager Chamberlain, who now trembled lest those whom he thus sought to entrap in the very manner, should through some evil agency be spirited away, before the King could be brought to witness for himself the evil doings carrying on so near his presence. Following close after, came some dozen archers of the guard, marvel-

ling wherefore they were so hastily summoned to attend their master at this late hour, and what could so strangely part him from his guests, and the continued revel.

Arrived before the entry, running through a plain looking house, de Vere halted, and whispering a word to the King, beckoned on the guard, and passing foremost up the narrow way, gained the door, on which, having gently tapped, it was in a minute after opened by a plump jolly looking dame, the proprietress of the mansion ; who at sight of the rich dress of ceremony adorning the person before her, started back, and would have loudly expressed her surprise had not a sign from the Chamberlain prevented her exclamations ; cautioning this good woman against uttering one word of alarm, the party entered, and the watchful trembling vrow, thus made aware of the dignity of her visitor, silently, as directed, led the way to a door situated at the opposite side of her ample kitchen, in which, as it appeared, she had sat alone.

“Those whom you seek are all within here, sirs,” whispered the mistress, pausing at this entrance; “but I trust ye mean them no violence, for surely they be honest, virtuous folk, or their looks sorely belie them.”

A low groan here burst involuntarily from the King, who stood within hearing, still closely muffled. The eye of de Vere turned towards him at the sound, lighted up by a grave, self-satisfied smirk of appeal, as he pointed towards the near door in question.

“Proceed, sir,” cried the King, in answer; “pause not, but demand admittance in our name.” The Chamberlain bowed, and struck loudly upon the door.

“What now, good dame?” asked a manly voice from within.

De Vere, by signs, directed the woman to reply, which she did, in a voice naturally agitated, saying—“You must open quickly, in the name of the Virgin, to save yourselves from the King’s anger.”

“What says the mistress?” demanded the

voice, lifting at the same time, cautiously, the latch.

"Open in God's name, I say, and resist not," unbidden, replied the woman, seeing the archers closing in to the entrance.

"Open in the King's name," authoritatively called out de Vere, seeking, as he spoke, to thrust open the door, just drawn ajar; but in that instant it was dashed to, and the old man's shoulder was nipped in between it and the wall, where in another second it had been surely crushed into splinters, had not the already excited King, roused by his cry of agony beyond the power of restraint, here dashed with his whole force against this barrier to his will, which yielding before his great strength, partly gave way at the hinges, to be in a minute utterly demolished by the ready axes of the soldiers, who promptly seized this signal for action.

"Yield thee, thou black traitor, doubly damn'd for paltering with our late mercy," shouted the King, foaming with fury at sight of

Maltravers, who stood with his sword bared near the entrance, but with the point lowered even with the floor; whilst in the middle of the room appeared the Ladye Agnes Beauchamp, looking the very personification of absolute despair.

Maltravers respectfully retreated before his sovereign to the opposite side of the room, crying—"Proceed not, my liege, so——"

But Edward, whose rage was deaf, again broke in with—

"Traitor, speak not to me more, or by God's word I'll cleave thee to the ground;" seeking, as he spoke, for his sword, which, happily, he wore not—at the same instant of time, a door immediately behind Sir Johan, flew open, and forth stepped young Borgia, who first shutting the bolt behind him, hastily turned, sword in hand, to face the intruders, ignorant alike of the cause of this outrage, and the presence of his royal master; of which, however, he, on his last movement, became at once apprized, for at sight of this new wonder, Edward, with added

violence, continued—"Hah! base minion, art thou caught here too?—what! and wilt thou hold weapon against our breast?—out, worm!"

Springing forward, his eyes blazing with fury, he dashed with a blow of his gloved hand the weapon from the unnerved grasp of poor Borgia, and snatching it up, would have slain his esquire, where he passively stood, had not Ladye Agnes, with a shriek of horror, here thrown herself between, exclaiming—

"Hold, hold, my liege!—for your soul's peace slay not so madly this innocent youth"—which cry of the ladye was followed by a succession of yet louder and more startling shrieks and remonstrances, coming from within the next chamber, the door of which the terrified inmate was evidently seeking to force open.

At the sound of this last voice, the wrathful monarch checked his raised hand and listened—his broad chest becoming palpably convulsed, and heaving with fearful throes of agonizing shame and rage working awfully from within.

"Out, infamous!" he exclaimed, bending a

look of burning scorn upon the kneeling ladye. "advance, archers, seize upon this trembling slave, and bear him, together with these accursed panders to his guilt, within some sure confinement—let them have speech with none—lay hold on, and carry them out from my sight, that is blinded to look longer on such."

The mingled invectives and prayers from the inner room, which for a moment had ceased, were redoubled at the hearing of this order.

"Listen to one word in private, my gracious lord," cried Leonard, as overcome by grief, shame, and despair, Ladye Agnes sank lifeless into his arms.

"Obey me, archers—on your lives bear them out of my sight, lest with my own hand I play executioner on them," madly reiterated the wrought King.

"Only this," Leonard, with his whole force, called out as the men were hurrying him away; "let me implore the King to open yonder door without witness, else will he surely rue this haste."

The guard pressed quickly outward with

their prisoners ; their retiring footsteps soon were lost in distance ; those agonized exclamations issued no longer from the yet unexamined chamber ; but all was in a minute hushed and still, as though no such scene of tumult had ever taken place here. The King, leaning upon the weapon in his hand, sought to dash from his eyes the large beads of sweat trickling from his burning forehead ; and after, on casting a half-bewildered stare around, he perceived he was indeed alone, with the exception of the Chamberlain, who was standing by the outer door, with his cold look of habitual courtly attention fixed upon him.

“ You may now retire, my Lord,” calmly said Edward : “ draw close that entrance after you, and so keep it, until such time as we shall seek to pass outward.”

The well-trained noble bowed and vanished : the entrance was closed—then the eyes of the King, turning in the opposite direction, became anxiously rivetted upon that other door, and, bending his ear downward, he seemed, with a

nervous air, to listen for some sound of life from its occupant, who, awhile back, had been clamourously loud.

“ Silent as the grave ! ” muttered the listener, in a tone of apprehension. “ Alack ! alack ! she cannot have been so mad, so desperate as to——we are alone ! ”

With this raised thought he leaped to the door, and, drawing the bolt, pulled it eagerly open, when, coiled closely as possible against the entrance, he perceived the form of a woman apparently struggling in the last agonies of death. Uttering a low cry of horror, Edward stooped over the female thus writhing at his foot, raising her on to his bent knee, as one might lift a cradled infant.

The eyes of the sufferer opened ; they were fixed at once upon his face ; her lips gaspingly moved ; her eager hands sought to clasp his neck, but her swollen tongue refused to make any articulate sound.

Again rising, still with the female in his arms, the King cautiously glanced outward ;

then, shutting the door, enclosed himself and his companion within the privacy of the inner apartment.

Still had there been so far, one witness of his emotion Edward little dreamed of; for, huddled up under the heavy carved seat, from off which he had shrunk on the first hint of danger, lay the terrified Andreas, who, upon the King's enclosing himself within the other chamber, cautiously unrolled his little body, casting his large black eyes timidly upon the window he guessed could be at no vast distance from the ground; towards this he next sought to make as quickly as his faltering step and failing knees would bear him tip-toe on: once gaining its support for his extended hands, he halted to take free breath, as well as to gather a fresh stock of courage and strength for the boldest part of his enterprize. Opening the casement, too small to have given freedom to any individual less happily moulded for so narrow an escape, he lowered himself by his hands, and, although failing to feel the ground, as he had

flattered himself with being able thus to accomplish, he, nevertheless, boldly let go his hold, to measure his full length on the road, after a fearful fall of some eighteen inches, but which, to his bewildered senses, had seemed a depth infinite and fathomless.

“The ever-merciful saints be glorified for this miracle!” muttered the pious Andreas, yet clinging to the ground, as though resting on a precipice edge. “I am out of the lion’s den, and, as I think, with no bones broken by my perilous fall.”

“Why, what is here?” cautiously cried a voice in answer to this ejaculation, at the same time forcibly turning the tiny body over with a foot thrust. “See, ye! if some of these rascal bowmen haven’t been throttling poor old Master Andrey! and then chucking him, like nobody’s dead dog, out o’ this open casement here!”

“Hold, hold, knave! foot me not so rudely over,” sharply cried Andreas, at once recognizing the voice of Hawkwood; then gathering

himself nimbly up, to find that he was indeed face to face with that worthy, whose presence, for once at least, appeared most welcome ; for, clutching fast hold of his coat, he tremulously went on—" Ha, good Gilbert, for the love I know thou bearest Leonardo, help me to scramble quickly forward, for my limbs, though in their places, fail me grievously, and small wonder after my awful leap ! Woe's me ! woe's-me ! good fellow ; he, and thou, and I, and all of us are, I fear, in worse jeopardy than thou canst dream of ! "

" Nay, of that there is small doubt," ruefully replied Hawkwood ; " for you must know that, standing on tip-toe, I beheld all that passed through that very window you tumbled so cleverly out of."

Here Andreas lifted his head with an incredulous smile, whilst Hawkwood continued glibly—" You must know that I was on my way to the water-side, when plump I meets the Chamberlain and the archers of the King's guard coming out o' the ship ; so, guessing

something worth seeing was a-foot, I quietly followed them here, and, as I tell you, saw all that passed after, till such time as they marched Len and them others off,—but never feel so sore about this, Master Andrey, the King's anger, though cruel hot, will soon blow over; for, as I make it out, here is only some light o' love or other in the way after all—eh?"

"Peace! peace, boy!—thou babblest, and art ignorant wholly of the reason of the King's wrath, which much, I fear, blood only will appease, since he thus passionately views the matter. My son, my son! they will surely destroy thee suddenly to keep all quiet and unknown. We must use all means for safety that yet offer, ere it be too late; therefore first lead me straightway to the noble daughter of the Ruward; she will, I know, warmly plead for my poor boy, who so served her at his own great peril—and her prayer the King must listen to. We are now moving thitherward, are we not, honest Gilbert?" next inquired Andreas, as with tottering steps he trotted

by the side of the sturdy apprentice, sustained by his arm.

“As straight as we can go,” answered Gilbert; “and, by the mass, ’tis, I take it, the wisest course we could steer to fall on help; for no where, I warrant, hath Len gotten better wishers.”

“Thank God! thank God!” ejaculated Borgia, raising his disengaged hand, “I hope so, I know so, indeed—we will yet save his life and all shall be kept secret to the King’s wish; he shall quit this land—he shall go with me to Venice, to Rome, or to the world’s end, so they but spare him to my age, that would be dark, indeed, without him—but whither have they now ta’en him? knowest thou, good Gilbert?”

“Only close by, to the west gate, where they will come by no present ill; for one of Sir Johan’s Irish riders has the guard. I had word with him for a second, and he said Sir Johan, in passing, had whispered that all would go well in good time.”

“ Said he so, truly ? ” almost screamed Andreas, halting, and peering up into Gilbert’s face, “ that all would be well !—thanks !—thanks ! But he’s a rash man, is that Knight ; ’tis true, he hath much craft, and worldly foresight, but is daring and venturesome, withal, as I well know—yet may he be correct in this, for his own surety is no less periled.”

Arrived before the door of Van Heylen, they had little trouble in gaining admittance ; for, late as was the hour, there yet sat up some within, beguiling the time they passed, waiting for the master, who was amongst the number feasting with the King. Once admitted within the hall, and free to indulge in apprehension, the grief of Andreas became clamorous, and not to be consoled. It was to no purpose the domestics assured him that their Mistress, Bertha, had retired to rest ; he loudly insisted on her being awakened, and informed of his desire to see her, a piece of intelligence which his own shrill voice soon

made known in the remotest parts of the capacious building.

Once informed of the cause of the raised outcry, and who it was requiring her help, it needed but little to draw Bertha from her quiet chamber. Quickly descending to the hall, she was here met by the distracted Andreas, and accosted with such eagerness of gesticulation, such unintelligible volubility of speech, as, on a less serious occasion, might have excited laughter ; so whimsical were his contortions of feature and limb, whilst relating his fears and Leonardo's perilous condition. So much out of the abundance of his words, it was easy enough to collect ; for this was the cuckoo-note of the old man's song ; but when the startled maiden sought to enquire the particulars of his strange arrest, and his offence, her ingenuity was completely baffled, by the prolix and mysterious heap of words Andreas managed, without meaning, to string together, still ending in the one assertion of Leonardo's inno-

cence, and the great danger he stood in from the raised anger of the King.

Hawkwood impatiently beheld the perplexity and distress of the anxious Bertha, who more than once bent on him a beseeching glance, as if to challenge any information on this topic, which he might stand possessed of; taking advantage, therefore, of one of the old man's pauses for the free vent of his grief, and the recovery of his breath, Gilbert ventured, in as quiet a way as possible, to give his interpretation of the matter, which, indeed, he firmly took to be the true one, saying—

“ Why, in homely truth, ladye, old Master Andrey, here, is rather dashed about speaking right to this matter, in your hearing, for fear o' vexing you; though there's little serious in all that Len hath done, after all; and, in my mind, it were best tell you fairly on't at once.”

“ Go on, I implore thee, good fellow,” cried the maiden, as Hawkwood cast a side look at Borgia, who was striving to make

some intelligible sound or other, as he stood agape, struck with horror before this prelude of Gilbert, who went boldly on—

“ Well then, plainly and in simple words, this fuss is all about some wanton court-dame, as I take it—pity there be any such—who hath followed us over here, for love o’ Len’s bonny face: this the King is sore angered to find out; but——”

“ Out, thou shameless varlet,” here burst forth Borgia, restored to speech by the assurance thus given, that Hawkwood was, in fact, ignorant of that which it was most essential should be kept unknown, and, at the same time, grieved to witness the downcast look of Bertha, before the coarse, free tongue of the untutored Gilbert.

“ Out on thy idle brain, I say, for forging such unthought for lies—believe him not, sweet ladye, Leonardo hath no light love; he is too noble, far, too true a spirit to affect that he is incapable of feeling, and is, by nature and his honest breeding above the practice

of such infamy. As for those dames he spoke of, they are as far above knowledge of this varlet's, as is the honesty of my son above all shame. Ask me not more, for I am tongue-tied and may not utter all that I know, even for his precious sake I would humbly move thee to save—and thou wilt pray to King Edward for his life? I ask no more, and this I know thou wilt not fail to do, for, I swear, it would not paint a blush upon an angel's cheek, openly to plead his cause before the whole world."

"I do full readily believe this," frankly answered the generous maiden, "and before the whole world, if it be needful, will I kneel and beg for the life of my preserver."

The entrance of Van Heylen, followed by Audeley, here afforded a new field for poor Borgia's grief; both these personages were quickly made acquainted with the arrest of Leonard, at which event they expressed a surprise that plainly bespoke their ignorance of the matter up to this present moment.

It appeared from Van Heylen's statement to his sister, that they had just been dismissed by the Chamberlain, who excused the King on the score of his being ill at ease and retired for the night ; as for Audeley, he, for some whim or other, accompanied Van Heylen this way home, and had been induced to enter by the bustle apparent at this late hour, which, as he softly said, " had roused his fears for one over whose safety he was sworn, like a true knight, to watch ; " as he concluded his flourish, bowing low to • Bertha, who, during the last few minutes, had stood absorbed in sorrowful but useful meditation on the subject filling her every thought.

With the frankness which so well became the severe style of her beauty, she now approached the young noble, and in an intelligible manner detailed Andreas's account of Leonard's danger, entreating Audeley to watch over the safety of his friend ; in conclusion, begging that early in the morning he would seek to procure for her, at her request, an in-

terview with his royal master, whose generosity she had little fear of being able to rouse, unless the unknown offence of the prisoner was something heinous indeed.

Audeley listened to the ardent speaker with an attention amounting to reverence ; her deep spirit shone unveiled through her bright eyes, and ere she had ceased to speak, or had half recounted her debt to his friend, he knew, he felt that Leonard was beloved. As the sense of this fact first came upon him, he felt a throb of mortified pride knock at his heart, but the soul of Audeley was much too generous to encourage the growth of such a feeling, and, chasing it from his spirit, he rejoiced in his discovery, and found in it a new spur to rouse his mettle, by every hazard to preserve Borgia and effect the happiness of the being before him ; briefly but emphatically pledging himself to do all that love could hope for or friendship accomplish, Audeley took leave of the embarrassed maiden, who, in his last words, read his knowledge of her heart's secret.

Praying Andreas quietly to abide where he then was, and promising to take upon himself the care of Leonard's immediate safety, Audeley, followed by Hawkwood, left the house of Van Heylen, and thus accompanied, proceeded directly to the west gate, over which, he learned from Gilbert, the prisoners were confined.

Arrived here he found some difficulty in seeing the commander of the guard, and this, at length accomplished, was peremptorily refused admittance, or the least communication with Leonard, or with either of his companions in misfortune, such being, as the officer declared, the immediate order of the King.

More really startled by the serious colour this fact gave to the matter than by any thing he had previously learned, Audeley next hastened to the scene of the arrest, with the intention of endeavouring to win from the inmates all the information they might be possessed of, the better to guide him through this labyrinth ; here also, to his increased dismay,

he found a guard posted, forbidding all approach to the house; more perplexed than ever, he at length sought his own quarters, leaving Cyril and Hawkwood on the watch to inform him, in the event of any threatening movement occurring during the night, and, this arrangement made, flung himself upon his couch to envy Leonard even the danger which could call to his aid such an ally as "the peerless maid of Ghent."

CHAPTER XII.

ON the next morning, at an hour he considered almost unseasonable, James Audeley repaired to the Catherine, to ascertain when it might be possible to gain admittance to the King ; but, as early as it was, Gervaise Wilton informed him Edward was risen, and then closeted with the Chamberlain.

The mystery of the past night had been in no degree cleared up as yet, but was rather, in fact, heightened by a circumstance de Wilton now related, namely, that the King had, during the hours of darkness, repaired in person to

the gate where the prisoners were confined, there abiding in close confinement for a long hour or more.

“I am right cheered by this hearing,” cried Audeley, “as it augurs well for poor Borgia ; but who, in the name of young Cupidon, is the fair truant who hath run so wild a course after our smooth faced flower of the City ?”

“Nay ask not that of me, Audeley, thou art in his confidence, and ought to be able at least to venture a shrewd guess ; Bligh, who led the archer guard last night, whispered in my ear that the proud Agnes Beauchamp, no less, was one of these love lorn truants, for it appears there be two, though who the second is can only be known to the King, or de Vere, who, I suspect, it was first scented out this foolish chase, and after roused his master to hunt it ; but all will run smooth enough bye and bye, I warrant ; Ladye Agnes, ’tis certain, is already returned to the house whence she was so roughly removed, being, to make amends, escorted back by the gallant Sir Ed-

ward in person, who continued, I am told, in close conference with her ladyship the whole way home too."

"Well," said Audeley musing, "I trust our lucky esquire may come clear out on't, even for his own sake; for if he does, there lies in his way a far rarer gift of fortune than I suspect he now dares dream of."

"How mean you, cousin James?" asked de Wilton.

"Oh, Gervaise!" sighed Audeley, "what thinkest thou of the adopted daughter of the late Ruward being smitten with the fair fashioning of this same city esquire?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed de Wilton, amused by the lack-a-daisical air of his friend, "why, Audeley, thou art mad, sure—I thought thou hadst as good as boasted to me two days back, that it was thine own comely looks had sped the heart of that same maiden?"

"Marry, aye! and so ought it in reason to have turned out," sighed Audeley, nothing disturbed by the banter, "for, by my faith,

she saw enough of my face to like it; but women are, to a proverb, vagrant in their fancies—as all that is here come to light will the stronger confirm—the rarest proffered gift is, by them, oftentimes spurned for some wooden toy, less easy to come by; even so hath this wayward maid cast her beauteous eye over James Audeley, to fix it on this squire of low degree; but what of that, her wilful choice shall neither sour my wit nor taint my good heart, and, by the help of dame Venus, I will yet serve my fair mistress to her liking, that is, if Borgia come worthily out of this scrape, even for the love I swore to her.”

“Said in the same light spirit and noble heart which ever mark James Audeley; yet, by my faith, thou hast here, I doubt, overtasked thy wit—knowest thou not that this damsel is already betrothed to young Courtressin, who even now abides here to learn the King’s pleasure on this and other points connected with his late guardian’s death?”

“Tush, man!” cried Audeley, “that boy

hath already chosen for himself, and, as the King will find, is not made of the stuff to be beaten from a bargain of his own making ; the wedding was fast done by the same bull priest who held us so long at bay when we hounded his master by the sea-side there—he it was that fairly joined them, as I had it first from Whitehorse, who looked on at the wedding, and after from the priest himself. I questioned him on the point by the way yesterday, from some personal interest I then had in this matter, which, woe's me ! is now no more. Old Heylen, too, last night told me, he had it from his sister, that the pair were loving as turtles, and in this he may be credited, for he would have them, notwithstanding, put asunder at any hazard—and to this hath already, as I know, moved the King, in the teeth of Konigsfoorde and the other cousins, who will not hear of the match being questioned.”

“ Well,” still incredulously observed de Wilton, “ and even supposing this match be permitted to stand, and the maiden so freed,

yet can I not see with what face, or by what right the King, even if he desired it, could so basely dispose of this damsel."

"By the right of a guardian, to be sure," answered Audeley, "for such he now is to her; nor is the match in itself so unequal as thou wouldst make it out to be, for the maiden after all is but the child of some trader relative of Artevelde's, and for wealth, I doubt not old Andreas can tell ducat for ducat against the best in Flanders, and score last too; then Leonard himself bears as gallant a heart as ever won spurs, and hath, besides, done the King near service, who, setting aside that he is ungrateful to none, hath a strong impulsive liking to this favourite of fortune: but mum, here stalks the stiff old Chamberlain from under the poop, looking as though he bore the ship on his shoulders.

"Good day, my lord, has his Grace risen?" Audeley added, after returning the grave salutation of the stately de Vere.

"The King hath risen."

“And is he alone, my lord?”

“He is so, I fancy; at least I left him so.”

• “Then will I, with your good leave, my lord, pass by you and enter; for 'tis my duty to be with his Grace at his rising this morn.”

So saying Audeley stepped nimbly by the old courtier, and passed within the poop, whilst the latter, calling to an attendant near, despatched him straightway to find out, and bring before the King, Claus Burchen, the captain of the galley belonging to the late Ruward.

Audeley was immediately admitted to the presence of his master, and was received with the gracious cordiality ever exhibited by Edward towards those whom he loved. On this occasion he sat upon a low couch, as yet only half dressed, or rather half undressed, for it was plain to see he had thrown himself, with but little preparation, to snatch a short repose even where he yet sat; his air, although exhibiting some touch of abstraction and anxiety, was rather sorrowful than angered, and, thus encouraged, Audeley seized the present occa-

sion frankly to make his request in the name of her who desired, at the soonest moment, to be admitted to the royal presence. •

“By my holy-dame, but thou art a right early petitioner,” cried Edward. “Hah! the King’s ruffle travels fast, meseems! why how the plague came this maiden informed so early of that which could not have happened until long after she was a-bed, as I should guess?”

“Maidens that love, sleep light, my liege; such have eyes like the lynx and ears like the hare,” significantly answered Audeley, smiling at the surprised look of the King. • “Besides, your Grace, old Andreas made clamour enough in his terror to have raised the whole town; he might well therefore wake a timorous maiden from out her slumber.”

“Aye, aye!” exclaimed the King, in his turn smiling, “and, being thus awakened, she forthwith sends for her true knight to sing her again to rest, I take it. What, art thou caught, cousin James, by this fair wench of Ghent?”

“It were too hard for nature to live near such beauty and not feel its influence,” answered Audeley, modestly, with an affected embarrassment of manner which greatly amused the monarch. “Your highness it was that thrust me into the fire, so must you not blame me that I got scathed in the frequent encounter.”

“We blame thee not, James; but, if thou art serious in the matter, wish thee well enough to seek to make all smooth for the furtherance of thy suit.”

“I cannot say,” mumbled Audeley, with mincing trepidation; “but it might have proved as your Grace suspects, had I not known the maiden to be fast betrothed.”

“And that is true too; but know, that here is a breach fallen in that affair, which might be left open, could we, by so guiding matters, serve one we love, and help our fair ward to a better husband.”

“I heartily rejoice to hear your Grace say this much,” briskly returned Audeley, “since,

at least, you may help her to one she loves dearer."

"Now art thou a bold faced varlet, Audeley, to say so much for thyself in open impeachment of the modesty and discretion of this young and innocent ladye."

"I spake not of myself, my lord," replied Audeley, with an air of most becoming bashfulness, "else had I surely, and with reason, been less assured in my bearing. I alluded to one whose fortune has come between me and the light of the fair sun we both in secret worshipped."

"Hah!" exclaimed the monarch, colouring slightly, "what trickery is here? Speak, Audeley, to whom dost thou allude in this matter, which touches so nearly a ward of mine?"

"Even," cried Audeley, dropping on to his knees, "of him, to plead for whose safety and liberty, the fair Bertha desires to be admitted to this presence—of him who so happily achieved her safety and honour when both

were fearfully threatened—of him whose known worthiness emboldens me also to fling my poor prayers between your Grace's anger and his offence, and to implore you to weigh the good service he so freely did on a late occasion, against this present matter he stands affected by—need I say, Sire, that I speak of your imprisoned esquire, young Borgia?"

"What!" cried the King, in an accent of uncontrolled wonder, "meanest thou this, Audeley? Wilt thou really tell me that this maiden's love hath been sought and won by that boy?"

"I say not so much, my liege—na, I think not Borgia yet knows his happiness, or hath even ventured to win a knowledge of it; but certain am I 'tis only for your Grace to have the maid before you, and on this subject hear her freely speak, when you will be as well assured of the matter as I am, that have only her soft looks and love-lorn manner, as translated by my own wit, to judge by."

"Out, Audeley," good-humouredly retorted

Edward, “ thy wit is as deceiving as woman’s eyes are. I see plainly thou wilt thyself turn out the true lover, after all said here ; but go back to her that sent thee, and be thou her escort hither, James ; as for our citizen esquire, his offence originated in the folly of others, not from any fault of his ; let not my words be further bruited, but for him have no fear. Say nought of this, however, to the maiden, since I would fain, through her raised apprehensions, become really master of her heart ; and the heart of woman is a riddle, trust me, James, not so easily read as to be at a glance laid bare like thy light wit ; so good morrow, thou untimorous suitor—we will dispense with thy service, that thou mayest the sooner gladden the eyes of this ladye with thy presence, and her ears with the news of thy success. Send Wilton and de Vere to me—so speed on thy errand.”

Audeley, with a glad heart, bounded forth, and with a smiling face, whose joyous expression he manfully, but vainly, strove to hide,

hastened, not to rouse Bertha from her couch, for this she had long before quitted, but to lighten her heart with the tidings of his ready success, and say that his master awaited even then her coming.

“Let us at once then depart back,” cried the attentive listener, in no way seeking to disguise her impatience, “for surely, surely my prayers must prevail—for the sake of the Ruward’s memory he will not spurn the first, the only suit I will ever make in that name; I shall have the joy of rendering that noble youth back life for life—more I seek not, pray not for, and this must he not deny me; but I forget we must abide Van Heylen’s return,” she added; “he is gone with a follower of the youth’s to strive to win some word with him; on his coming back, which will, I doubt not, be speedy, he shall conduct me to the King’s presence.”

“With your fair leave,” cried Audeley, bowing, “I am here your appointed guide, sent by my master to herald you to his face—

a duty too much to my heart to allow of my giving place to any other."

On arriving thus escorted, on board the Catherine, Bertha found the ancient Chamberlain in waiting, possessed of instructions to receive her; and by him was she straightway led into the presence of the King.

With a modest, subdued, yet firm and self-possessed air, and with the manner of one who had well weighed the matter of her suit, did the maid advance to the foot of the throne, before which gracefully kneeling, she kissed the hand held out to her, to be instantly raised by the gallant sovereign; motioning de Vere and his attendants to withdraw, he desired the fair suppliant to be seated on a low stool close by his knee, and taking her hand in his, even as a parent would take the hand of a well beloved child, he at once relieved her from the embarrassment of a cold, formal statement of her object, by himself leading her to the subject, saying—

"Well, fair ward of ours—for, be it known,

such art thou lawfully become, beshrew the cause ; so, thou art up-roused thus early, we hear, to pray for some remission of the heavy penalties incurred by our young esquire, Borgia ?”

“ I have heard of the peril he stands in,” calmly said Bertha, “ and am come to offer my prayer that you would graciously be pleased to avert from him the weight of your dread displeasure.”

“ And how, may we learn, fair ward, hath this rash boy won such high favour in those speaking eyes of thine ?”

A heightened tint spread over the maiden's noble brow, as she replied—

“ I should be worthless and ungrateful, indeed, did I so soon forget the worse than death from which the courage of that same youth rescued me ; for the which rescue, permit me to add, your Grace, too, stands in some sort indebted.”

“ Homely urged, i'faith,” gravely observed the King, “ but see thou here, gentle Bertha,

although it is natural, and indeed fitting, all men should feel and cherish gratitude; and though true it be, that beauty wears no brighter jewel than a tear of thankful pity; yet have those, by fate appointed to bear crown and sceptre, certain kingly duties to perform, before which the private feelings of the mere man must be cast prostrate down, buried beneath the feet of those for whose welfare only kings rule.

“Now this same youth, for reasons which may not now, even to thee, nor can be ever openly made known, must not, since it might affect the general weal, again return to England; to keep him from which forbidden course, since we know love of country to be a stubborn passion, it becomes needful, although his life is in no jeopardy, to keep him, henceforward, and for ever, a close bound captive.”

“A captive!—for ever a captive?” broke forth the attentive maiden—then clasping her hands together, she rapidly flung herself before the feet of the King, bending on his face her

swimming eyes, and resisting all his attempts to raise her up she hurriedly went on—
“ Oh, say not so, say not so, Sire ;—doom not one so fair, so young, so full of lofty hopes and brave aspirations, to such a cruel destiny, worse, far, than any sudden death, however dreadful. In the name of mercy I implore you—by the memory of the dead Ruward, I conjure you, deny me not this first, only prayer lips of mine shall ever pour out before your throne—hold not this youth in a perpetual bondage ! O ! bethink you, King, how terrible must it be to a young, free spirit to wake day after day a hopeless captive to drag about a chain upon the mind, which, day by day weighs heavier, and galls more keenly, until, at length, the stout heart yields and sickens in despair, the worn out brain bursts beneath the ceaseless pressure, and the beautiful form, which once enshrined a generous, hopeful spirit, becomes the foul tenement of the howling fiend, is cheated by madness of its true identity, and lost alike to hope and fear for ever !

“ O think of this, and spare that hapless youth—banish him from his country, if needs be—drive him away, to wander amongst far off lands where your island’s name hath not been ever heard—do this, and be it on his peril ever to return. This will I call mercy, and bless you for the sentence ; but, gracious King, bid me not again to rise till you reverse this barbarous decree ?”

No weak grief during the course of this passionate appeal, checked or impeded the speaker’s utterance ; and, having thus concluded, with her dark imploring eyes searchingly rivetted upon the face of the monarch, and firmly resisting his desire to raise her, she continued kneeling before his seat, resolutely abiding his next word. Edward gazed with evident admiration on the lofty spirit thus self-abased in mercy’s cause, then, after a moment’s silence, coldly answered—

“ This, maiden, is pitifully urged, and well becoming one so gentle ; yet, were we to listen to this prayer, and painful will it be to resist prayer of thine, yet, what guarantee

have we that the banished man shall not again return unto the land, to whose quiet, some gained knowledge which he has, if evilly used, may render him a very pest and curse?"

"His word!" replied Bertha, her face glowing with the generous belief prompting the reply, "let but the promise pass his lips, and if more be needed, I will be his hostage myself, will pledge my freedom, life and all, upon that young man's faith, yet sleep no hour less tranquil when so bound."

"Hum! boldly offered," cried the King, bending a searching glance upon his ward, and in a significant tone demanding—"and all this for gratitude, and no more hearted feeling?" Then, and then only did the conscious Bertha bend her graceful head towards the ground, in silence, whilst, calmly, the King proceeded—

"Now, maiden, answer me, and frankly; my minutes for determination are already counted—I will not advance more words to urge you to speak plainly, since I well know

I address no ordinary mind, or appeal to one by ordinary fashions guided—you will reply frankly I doubt not ?”

Bertha was yet silent, but the increasing colour on her cheek, her sunken head, and heaving bosom, all told how deeply she attended to this demand.

“ I feel,” continued the King, “ that it is in your power, indeed, to make the bold pledge you proffer safely binding ; for, what heart could peril life of yours for any wayward caprice of fancy, however strong. Answer me therefore—were I to release from close captivity and only banish this doomed man, wouldst thou in faith become his guarantee then ?—wouldst thou, as his *wife*, take on thee a lawful title to attend his steps, and teach him to forget the country which he may never more return to ?

“ So guarded, only, dare I trust him: answer, therefore, wilt thou, to save him from the fate so fearfully figured by thy tongue, take on thyself this office ?”

“I would do much to save him!” answered Bertha, striving to collect her faculties.

“But cannot make this sacrifice?”

“Answer me first,” demanded the maid, once more firmly raising her eyes, “does this offence, calling for such heavy payment, taint his honesty, his manhood, or his honour?”

“Neither, on my faith, are by this, or, as I think, by aught else impeached.”

“Yet may he not, by other means than those you proffer, hope for freedom?”

“I see none other.”

“Then shall he not be kept long to languish in captivity through backwardness of mine,” firmly but maidenly answered Bertha; “I am ready to fulfil my share of this proffered compact.”

“By God’s truth! but thou art a strange, noble wench,” burst forth Edward, helping to raise his overpowered ward, and embracing her tenderly, “yet, sit and compose thee: think, sweetheart, how much thou leavest for

the love of this youth, whom I may not longer call unhappy."

"I have thought and said," replied Bertha, in a low, even voice, "and, if he will accept the conditions, may not, desire not to go back."

"Yet, bethink thee, look to his humble, nameless state, to share which thou must of necessity give up country, kindred, and high condition."

"I see but little to love in this ungrateful country, my high condition lies buried in his grave, whose power alone bestowed and could maintain it; and kindred I know now of none."

"Nay, then," said the King, "'tis fitting thou shouldst, indeed, learn the extent of this great sacrifice, which I ne'er thought woman mad enough to make; listen, and from my lips learn that thy estate is noble, and better secured by the Ruward's death; that thy wealth is great, thy kindred numerous, and amongst the mightiest of this land; in short, know that thou, Bertha, art the sole child and

heiress of Bertram de Courtressin, and that young Philip, thy betrothed, who has hitherto borne this state, is none other than the son of Artevelde."

"And is all this really so?" thoughtfully asked Bertha, "or does your Grace only jest further with my woman's weakness?"

"In this I jest not, by my soul," answered the King quickly, "come, I do see thou art touched by this hearing, and truly Courtressin's Countess may well spurn the lot which it might not have been unseemly in the lowly born Bertha to accept."

"My liege," proudly replied the ladye, with look of honest dignity, "the daughter of Courtressin would but ill credit her noble birth did she shrink at one moment from the fortune she had accepted in another, or with her own lips impeach the worthiness of her free choice, since never can I feel any title half so proud as that of adopted daughter of the Ruler of Flanders."

"Nay," said Edward, smiling lightly, "I

did but jest, young Borgia stands not in such great peril as thy roused fancy wove from my first hasty speech ; nor needs it that for his security so vast an offering should be made."

The blood in a moment rushed over the face and neck of the distressed maiden, and casting a look full of reproach upon her royal guardian, she sought to express her indignation at the trap thus laid for her feelings, but, in the effort, her woman's spirit, overwrought by the violence of the previous trial, failed her at this point, and giving way to a flood of long painfully suppressed tears, she covered her face within her hands, and unrestrainedly wept.

"Come, come, sweet maid," said Edward, penetrating at once her feelings, and changing his tone and manner for the extreme of kindness, "now is it our turn to cry a 'mercy!' nay, weep not more, for every tear of thine speaks reproach on our unfair practice. Trust me, I sought not at first so closely to probe

that gentle, yet brave spirit of thine, nor will I now prove unworthy the confidence I have even by these means won."

"Permit me to retire home," faintly cried Bertha, quite overcome, "your Grace hath my secret ; I will not louder reproach you with the manner of your obtaining it, but only pray you not further to mock me yourself, nor expose to any other my foolishness."

"Were I to speak only the truth I could say no word of thee that would not redound to thine own honour as well as to the glory of that generous sex of which thou art so spotless an ornament ; credit me, in this seeming rough sleight I have only sought to consult thy happiness, which the haste our pressing affairs call for would not admit of time by any more courteous mode to win the clue to.

"Now retire, but hold yourself prepared some hour hence to attend our summons, to be made known to those of your noble kindred present, for that you truly are ; in the meantime, think on all that hath passed here—

which lies buried in this silent breast, never, on my knightly word, to be revealed to any—and with a calm spirit be prepared at that hour to act openly as shall then seem best to your own wit and judgment, which need little guiding from any.”

The King recalled the Chamberlain and his attendants, and bidding de Vere to attend Bertha home, himself led her to the door of his cabin, and there, whispering, “courage, fair ward of ours, courage,” left her to the honourable charge of the old lord, who, in obedience to his master’s orders, attended her to the house of Van Heylen without once attempting by a word to call her attention from the recollections which yet overpowered her, a circumstance little honourable to the memory of the Chamberlain’s gallantry, but which, at the moment, proved the most acceptable homage he could have paid to the feelings of his charge.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN the course of this forenoon Claus Burchen had, in his turn, an interview with the King, and was observed, on quitting the presence, to hasten, with an important look, on board the handsome galley, which still remained under his command, and immediately to set about clearing ship for sea.

On board the Catherine much bustle of preparation continued, with a great passing of lacquais to and fro; the face of de Vere was also unusually big with mystery and importance,

as, in his place, he gave directions for the reception of the high personages who, it was understood, were at noon to assemble in obedience to the royal mandate.

The King himself, on dismissing Burchen, repaired alone to that quarter, until the last night tenanted by Sir Johan de Maltravers, whither, about the same time, this Knight was conducted from the place of his confinement. An order had been left on board that for no business whatever was the sovereign to be interrupted or sent to during his stay here; and so strictly was this interpreted, that although, in the interim, messengers had come in from Ghent and other places on matters of great moment, yet was there no man took upon himself the responsibility of breaking on this long privacy, until, in his own good time, he quitted the place and returned again on ship board, just before the hour appointed for the assemblage of those especially summoned to this meeting; to which the various rumours afloat gave an air of uncommon interest, and

made all parties impatient for the result, which each man laid down after his own fancy ; all proving, however, equally remote from the simple fact.

At noon then, on the chief deck of the Catherine—which deck was provided with sundry openings through the ship's stout ribs on to the water, giving both air and light, as much as was needful, and was, in all other things, fitted up worthy of the great monarch who resided therein—were met the Flemish Lords of Kongsfoorde, Harlébeck, Dinant, and others, being kindred of Courtressin, together with John de Seagrave, Thomas d'Ughtred, Lord Beauchamp, the Baron Leibern, Sturrie de Mowbray, de Vere, and other English nobles.

On the one hand, near the throne, stood Philip de Courtressin, clad in weeds of mourning, as well became him for the double loss first of his great guardian, and now of the father of his wife : on the other side were grouped Van Heylen, his sister, and Bertha ;

a few feet in front of the throne stood a desk, with various clerkly appurtenances, at which, in formal attendance, appeared a notary, and his man, at all points prepared, on the word, to ply their trade.

Such was the disposition of the principals present, and on these strange preparations were all eyes yet at gaze, endeavouring to divine their purpose, when the King entered, in close conversation with Maltravers, followed by old Andreas and his fair nephew, as Leonard was by all considered.

Edward having, as was his wont, cheerfully saluted all present, he in a right kingly fashion seated him upon his throne, without more delay, speaking as follows—

“My lords and seigneurs, you the near kin, and friends, to the house of Courtressin, know that we have thought it meet to call ye here together, in order, before we depart from hence, duly to discharge, in your presence, and with your approval, the trust of guardian to

this youth and maiden, which office, by the will of the dead Ruward, as ye are already apprized, has lawfully devolved upon us.”

The seigneurs bowed, and the King proceeded to command that the will of the late Sir Bertram should be here read ; wherein, he declares his desire that the compact entered into between himself and Jacob Van Artevelde, respecting the union of their houses by a marriage, the covenanted particulars of which the said compact duly set forth, should be fairly carried into effect, the parties being arrived at the proper age.

“ This deed alluded to,” cried the King, “ is here, and the parties referred to are this youth, Philip, and Bertha, our fair ward. Now, it is well known to all that a match hath been hastily, and, we think, most unwisely concluded between the daughter of that double traitor, Alaine, Count de Rerefonde, and Philip, the long betrothed to this fair maiden, which marriage, if admitted, goes to destroy

the previous contract, and overturn the fixed purpose of the parents of these contracted ones ; still, through the unseemly haste, and other informalities apparent in this act, we doubt not, by your help, and the glad consent of this heedless youth's cooler judgment, to set it aside wholly, and so be enabled to do justice here. To consider this matter, then, so nearly touching the lasting welfare of both our wards, have we called you thus hastily together. How say you, Sir Ulic, may we not yet advisedly cause this hot marriage to be annulled and pronounced void ?”

“My royal lord,” gravely answered Konigsfoorde, “if in my own name, and on the behalf of my kinsmen here, whose sentiments on this point I have already gathered, I may be allowed to answer boldly, we are better content that this matter is as it is, and so be let to bide, since the match is more in accordance with the equal birth and degree of the parties,—meaning not offence to your Grace’s

gentle ward here. Therefore do we entreat you, seek not to alter that which in all things so fully contents those most dearly concerned."

"But mark," returned the King, with an air of doubt and gloom, "by your good leave, sirs, we have heard Sir Alaine's own marriage questioned, that is, its legality, it having been performed in a distant land, and by the same soldier priest who joined this pair together, he being indeed the only witness left, the other followers of Rerefonde, then present, having been since either hanged or slain in battle. We will, nevertheless, hear what this free priest saith, when it is for you to admit the truth of his testimony, as well as the legality of his own function."

At a signal from the King, a side door opened, and the form of the holy father was seen, painfully diving beneath; having entered, he still remained half bent, in order the better to accommodate to the scant elevation of the deck the loftiness of his person's measurement. Mathieu's look was grave, his cheeks less

ruddy, his bearing less bold, and a dim veil was clearly perceptible over his eyes, ill agreeing with their ordinary humourous and vivacious sparkle.

Casting a quick glance of shrewd enquiry round the assembly, he bowed low; then sighing very loud, half closed his eyes, and meekly stood abiding his time of examination.

“Now, shameless son of the church! thou homicidal priest,” cried the King, with a stern countenance addressing the patient, spirit-fallen Mathieu; “we have commanded thee hither to have true answer to some questions, which nearly touch those whom we are bound to care for; therefore, as thou hopest for the life we hold as forfeit, attempt not disguise or falsehood?”

“It must be a bribe I prize more highly than life, that will win me to lie just now,” heavily answered Mathieu. “What would your Grace that I should answer to?”

“In few words—it is by many doubted, if

thy late master, Count de Rerefonde, was ever lawfully espoused to the fair dame now called his widow. First then, canst thou speak positive to this matter?"

"As of a thing, in the doing of which I was the third party," promptly answered Mathieu, "being myself the priest that joined them in the bands of holy wedlock."

"Thou art a true priest then?"

"As surely as your Grace is a true King," boldly returned Mathieu, in the same tone.

"By your Grace's leave, for so much can I honestly avouch," here interposed Van Heylen, "since from boyhood I know this Mathieu, and well remember his taking orders at the house of St. John, at Bruges."

"Lives there any witnesses of this same wedding?" continued the King.

"'Tis possible, Sire, that such might be found after some travel and pains-taking; one we might have had here to-day, had your cross-bows shot less rudely—Conrade Stetten, that was yesterday morn brained by an iron

bolt whilst standing before his lord, having been present at the holy rite.

“ The Ladye, by these same hands, having been first made Catholic, was afterwards wedded, and great hopes have I, sinful that I am, from this same act of grace, seeing also that she was, from the first, a convert of mine own ; won from paganism and heathenry, in the time of my blessed captivity in Grenada, from whence, away out of the power of the pagan prince, her father, I aided Count Alaine to bear her wholly, even for her precious soul’s sake ; for else had she lived redemptionless until this very hour, which had been a grievous pity, as she hath proven a most sweet Christian.

“ If your Grace would have further proof, here is the testament of my noble lord, ever by him entrusted to my keeping lest any ill chance should suddenly come on him, which hath at last, unhappily, so befallen, as I have seen, and have bewailed with scalding tears and a sorrowful heavy heart.”

“ And in good time too, since it saved him

from a worse death, the which his treasons justly merited," cried the King.

"Heaven keep all men from such a rigid judge!" piously ejaculated Mathieu.

"And wherefore, Sir Priest?" sharply asked the King.

"Because," meekly replied Mathieu, "in these times, when conscience is played with so fast and loose, and where treachery is so highly paid, 'tis hard for those to resist who have any of the marketable commodity worthy disposal." Here the Priest cast a seeming unconscious glance towards the foreign nobles present, which, without the alteration of a muscle, nevertheless conveyed excellent meaning.

It was in truth with difficulty the King could suppress a loud laugh, as he stretched forth his hand to receive the document which Mathieu had drawn from a pouch he wore beneath the leathern jacque his resumed gown decently covered.

"How say ye, my lords," demanded Edward, "may this man's evidence be trusted here?"

“ In all this it is too well borne out by facts to be disputed, my liege,” replied Konigsfoorde.

“ I would every man here had always such honest vouchers,” observed Mathieu, half aloud.

“ And now, young sir,” cried the sovereign, turning to Philip where he rested, a calm but observant spectator of all that passed, “ what sayest thou to this quick wedding of thine ?”

“ Only that I would it had fallen yet quicker, my liege,” boldly replied the light-hearted husband of Alzire ; “ so would I earlier have been master of the happiness I now call mine, the which I prize more dearly than all in the world beside, and will only again part with to death, whose decrees are too strong to be by any resisted !”

“ By my patience !” cried the King, “ but ye read all from the same book here, and are too many for one to cope with, unless we find some ally—what ! dost thou then reject the hand of this maiden ?” he added, pointing to the confused Bertha, and the cheek of Leonard became flushed as his eye met hers ; for on

this question their sympathetic glances encountered midway.

“As any honest man is bound to refuse that tendered against the free will of the owner,” answered Philip, bowing low. “All things, my gracious liege, lean to their kind : now my light heart and supple wit held no place in the esteem of that fair maiden, who, from boyhood, I have consulted as a wise adviser, revered as a sage monitress, loved as a dear sister, but never dared to dream of as a wife ; in this, preferring a choice of mine own, to the being sillily chosen for, and not by, another.”

“And you, our scorned ward, what say you to this last gallant turn of your false betrothed, here ?”

“Only Amen ! to all which he has so truly uttered,” distinctly answered Bertha. Leonard again breathed freely, whilst, with an air of increasing wonder, real or affected, the royal guardian went on—

“Now by the word, is this past patience ;

and, since ye both thus stubbornly regret the choice of your fathers, to us it falls to make one for you at least, Ladye. As for the hot-brained husband, he is mad past cure !

“ It then appears, my lords, ye are well content with this union ? Will ye further promise to maintain these two and their heirs in the lands which now of right they hold ? ”

“ Faithfully do we promise this, my liege,” replied the ready kindred of Courtressin.

“ Witness this deed, then,” continued Edward, “ which, as ye may see, sets so much forth : and now, Sir Johan de Maltravers, give to our clerk here that same testament with which you were entrusted by the Ruward upon the evil morning of his death.”

Sir Johan approached the clerk at this command, laid the instrument before him, and amidst the profound stillness which succeeded the bustle of affixing the seals of Konigsfoorde and the rest, as witnesses guaranteeing the above-named proposition, the man of law, with a clear voice, rehearsed the particulars of the will of

Artevelde; wherein it was duly set forth that he bequeathed his great wealth to Philip, his only son, commonly known as Philip of Courtressin, on condition of his wedding the heiress of that noble house, hitherto known as Bertha Vander Reit, his kinswoman and adopted daughter; but in the event of his rejection of this marriage, so dearly sought for by the parents of both, then should these monies be adjudged between them, after the will of the King of England, who was made sole guardian."

Absolute was the wonder of the Flemish nobles as these last facts opened gradually upon them, and loud was the first burst of incredulity with which they hailed the communication so gravely made. The formality of the existing documents, however, together with the presence of Van Heylen, a living witness, soon made them sensible of the truth, strange though it might appear, and, suddenly, as loud became their protestations of love and interest in the young maiden, whom lately they had so lightly viewed.

The two persons really moved here were Philip Van Artevelde, as he was now declared, who felt struck to the soul at finding he had thus a parent to deplore, to whose last embrace even he had been so indifferently cold ; next to him our hero, Leonard, felt this last announcement knock at his very heart—for, in the maiden's elevation to such high fortune, he fancied that he heard the death-knell of his proud hopes.

Turning to Bertha, the King next graciously motioned her to approach, when, being come sufficiently nigh, he gently whispered in her ear—"Now, ward of ours, look to accept the trust you are pledged to, for with God's grace, will we forthwith make you answerable if we may ;" then in a loud voice addressing all, he added—

"'Tis fitting, my lords, that, in these disjointed times, so fair a maid as this is, should be confided to the care of some worthy guardian—one who can more narrowly look to her rights and regard her welfare, than we may, whose

rough fortune 'tis to be so often in saddle, and we should ill fulfil our trust did we fail so to furnish her whom we are sworn to deal honourably by.

“ I know,” cried the King, anticipating the offers and honied professions echoed from one to another of the surrounding group of kinsmen, whose ears were on the pryck—“ I feel, that I need not look further for one worthy of filling this honourable office than amongst those of her own blood assembled here—but, be it known, we have at this time a state culprit whom we would fain dispose of in some sure custody, whence he may not seek to stray, being, for reasons which must not now be rehearsed, banished his native land. Come thou forth, young Borgia.”

Leonard stepped with trembling eagerness by the side of the King, where Bertha already stood, scarcely less moved, though better prepared for this singular scene. All eyes became attracted by the new movement, and breathless expectation chained each tongue, whilst the

King, taking a hand of Borgia's, passed him to the blushing maiden's side, and placing it within her tiny grasp, continued—

“Here, Ladyc Bertha, is thy charge. Look well to this exile, since thou knowest the penalty of his escape, and for the deep debt he owes thy love, foul shame sit ever on his heart if in requital he prove not the honourable guardian of both thy rights and happiness !”

It was some moments before any present recovered from the surprise of this most unheard of movement. Meantime Borgia, overpowered by such sudden happiness, sunk upon his knee in silent gratitude before his mistress, who, on her part, sought to hide her agitation in the bosom of the kind Annechy, who, with eyes brimful of tears, stood by her : old Andreas, in his ecstasy, threw his arms round the burly Priest's knees, being the highest point he could readily grapple with, whilst the sonorous “Ho ! ho ! ho !” of the mischief-loving Mathieu, bespoke his ancient humour though

quenched, not wholly burnt up within him, as, in the lengthened visage of Konigsfoorde, he read his grievous disappointment.

The King re-seated himself; and, after the first buzz of wonder had circulated round, Sir Ulic gravely approached the throne, and, in a somewhat angered and loud tone of remonstrance protested against this act.

“As a near kinsman of this noble heiress,” he ended, “and in the name of all such, do I exclaim against this most dishonourable disposal of your royal ward, which surely can never be in accordance with her free will, and is basely degrading to her own estate as well as to those of her blood.”

“Tush, tush, my lord!” impatiently interrupted the King, “you speak you know not what. For the maiden’s choice, shame, I say, light on them that seek to force or thwart it, for she is fully capable of judging rightly—but for her estate or yours, talk not of this, since, by the word of a true knight and a crowned prince, I affirm, were she thrice noble both by

birth and alliance yet, choosing the youth beside her, will she be fitly mated."

"How, my liege?" haughtily retorted Konigsfoorde, "make ye so light of us nobles of Flanders? or do you but jest? for surely else can you not mean this poor nameless esquire here!"

"Even of this nameless esquire do I speak," calmly answered the King; "as for his wealth, that must depend on the ladye who may choose him, and the will of this old man so pleasedly chuckling by us here; but if he dies in the right mood, his godson's fortune, I fancy, may cry fellow to any in Flanders—eh, honest old Andreas?"

"Aye shall it, your Grace, not only when I die, but whilst I live, too," quickly answered the warm gold-worker, "to any in Flanders or France to boot!"

As he spoke his black eyes sparkled, he twisted in every imaginary angle his skull-cap round his head—each limb being likewise in motion and tremulous with over ecstasy.

“As for the present degree of the youth,” continued Edward, “we will at once, and worthily, amend his title by buckling to his heel the knightly spurs he hath already richly earned by the manful defence first, of his ladye, and next, of his King! First kneel down, our cousin James Audeley, no less worthy the proud honour, and, Leonard, do thou kneel here by the side of the best blood compassed by the four seas, to which, nevertheless, I now say aloud thou mayest fearlessly cry fellow.

“In such most noble brotherhood, take the last blow ye may with honour abide, from the hand of your sovereign; and here do we dub ye both knights of our round table at Windsor, bidding ye, in the names of God and St. George, be valiant, loyal, and constant; and, in the simple words of its motto—which, with the help of our companions, we yet look to make famous through the world—*Honi soit que mal y pense.*”

Profound silence reigned during the ceremony of the investiture: the aged Baron de

Mowbray took the spur from his own heel to buckle it on Leonard's, as in the like manner did Gervaise de Wilton to Audeley ; which ceremonial done, Edward proclaimed the new made knights, " brothers in arms," causing them to embrace, and vow true help and ready service one to the other for evermore. Looks of surprise were, meantime, exchanged amongst all present, and, so soon as the ceremony was fairly ended, the lord of Konigsfoorde again approached the throne, in a more modulated tone entreating that the King would now make known the true name and condition of him on whom he had been pleased to confer such various honours.

" That, my lord," gravely said the King, " although I confess it has been entrusted to me, may I not, at present, to any other make known. Nay, good, my lords, never look frowningly or dark upon this matter," cried Edward, with some heat; seeing the incredulous, scornful looks passing from one to the other, " for, by my soul, the best here would have quailed to

brook the frown of that boy's father, and the proudest been well pleased, and too much honoured, to have run by the rein of his mother's palfrey."

"We in nothing dispute the word of your Grace," doggedly returned the pertinacious Konigsfoorde, "yet, as the near kindred of this noble maiden, we look that, under promise of secrecy, to *us* at least for our honours' satisfaction, you will be graciously pleased to grant our request in this."

"Come near, Sir Ulic," after a short pause of consideration, said Edward, a ray of quiet humour kindling over his face, as the curious Konigsfoorde briskly sprang to the foot of the throne, there bending a ready ear to receive the confidence of the King, who, in an affected whisper, no word of which was, however, lost on any present, continued—

"You know the value, doubtless, Sir Ulic, of a promise given?"

The Knight bowed very low in proud assent.

“ You would not betray a trust confided to your honour ? ”

Again low bowed the eager seigneur.

“ You are a sworn Knight, and well and truly have studied how to guard against either threat, remonstrance, or entreaty, the secret of your Suzerain, your mistress, and your brother-in-arms ? ”

Pressing his hand upon his heart, Sir Ulic here bowed lower even than he had yet done ; meantime the silence of expectancy had become painfully intense, when Edward, in a yet softer whisper, most impressively added—

“ And so, Sir Ulic, do we ! Be content, therefore, with that you and all here already are possessed of, since what remains, is, and must continue, ‘ *The King's Secret.* ’ ”

CONCLUSION.

Who so shall telle a tale after a man,
 He must reherse, as neigher als ever he can.

CHAUCER.

IN obedience to the above charge given by the excellent Poet from whose prologue it is quoted—and further perhaps, for that it is humbly hoped some of the dramatis personæ of this true record, may have so far interested the reader as to leave in his breast a slight curiosity as to their subsequent fate—it has been judged fitting, after the example of older and abler chroniclers, to append the following brief notices.

On the evening of the day which was so decisive of the lovers' happiness, a covered lit-

ter quitted the quarters of Sir Johan de Maltravers, passing outwards towards the sea. In close attendance upon this, there rode the King, accompanied only by the new-made Knight, Sir Leonard, and old Andreas Borgia. It was, however, now generally known that those within this closely curtained vehicle, were the two English dames, whose presence here had, as it was said, chiefly caused the late singular sensation, and given birth to so much still unsatisfied curiosity.

The little party embarked on board the Morning Star, where she lay nigh to the mouth of the sluice, and having here abided in company until such time as the tide served for passing over the bar, the sovereign and Leonard alone were re-landed, whilst instantly after the light galley was beheld standing out for sea, with its fair freight, but whither bound, was from this hour, left to surmise alone; for the Morning Star never rose again upon the harbour of Sluys. Burchen, it was afterwards known, received a free commission from Ed-

ward to cruise against the Scots' pirates, and, at the siege of Berwick, was in a little time slain.

Many of course were the conjectures hazarded as to the evident connexion between the coming of these mysterious personages, and the sudden elevation of the *bourgeois* esquire; some of these wise suggestions were indeed of a nature far over wild and improbable for any sober belief, since there were not wanting fancies sufficiently vivid to assert that the companion of Ladye Agnes Beauchamp was in fact none other than Isabella, the Queen Mother; and, more,—that Sir Leonard was the very child reported to have been born during the period of the Queen's romantic love passages with Roger Mortimer, at the court of Hainault. Nay, the very fanciful insisted upon it that the boy so born, was truly the lawful brother of the King; Isabella having been, it was asserted, *enceinte* at the very time she sailed for France to solicit from her victorious brother some decent terms of peace on the behalf of her weak husband.

This last random guess—for it was in fact no more—chanced to receive some immediate colour from the grateful monarch's personal kindness to the young Knight, as all the distinctions heaped upon him were construed into a desire, on Edward's part, to make his brother amends for the loyal sacrifice of his birth-right, which could not, without reviving much scandal and inconvenience, have been, at this late day, publicly proven and avouched.

This latter conclusion time also served to confirm, from the singular chance that Sir Leonard never did revisit his native England.

On this present occasion when the court, two days after the solemnization of the wedding of Edward's *protégé*, quitted Sluys, and sailed back for home, the new-married couple, it was publicly known, voyaged away for Bordeaux; in which country they, for some years chiefly resided: the Knight winning the highest distinctions both as a soldier and statesman, under the government of the Black Prince.

Finally, it is recorded that he passed over

into Italy, whither he was invited to command the armies of Venice. Dying, many years after, whilst on a visit to that noble Seigneur, Sir Gilbert Hawkwood, at Florence, he was there interred with all the funeral pomp and circumstance befitting his condition. The name of Borgia, which he rendered so renowned, was inscribed upon his tomb; nor of his true birth was there anything more certain known than has, in the course of this imperfect history, been laid before the reader, whose patience may have sustained him to follow our hero thus far.

As for Messer Andreas, having honestly arranged his affairs in Lombard Street, he joined Sir Leonard at Bourdeaux, and ever after continued the inseparable companion of the family of him he loved so much. He at length, when ripe with age, died beneath his native balmy skies, rejoicing in the fame and happiness of his noble nephew, for such did Sir Leonard ever term himself, to the great uplifting of the pride of the fond old *Orefice*.

Sir Johan de Maltravers, to the surprise of the world, remained close in his royal master's confidence, and valorously attended him through all the bloody fields made terribly glorious in the course of the long unjust struggle Edward so tenaciously maintained against France. A war which laid desolate the unhappy country he sought to rule over, impoverished his own island both of its blood and treasure, and, worse than all, planted the seed of a most fertile hatred between two noble nations, the bitter fruit of which, after five centuries of mutual suffering, the liberal spirits of the present day find it difficult wholly to eradicate.

Father Mathieu, having been freed from all penalties, through the intercession of Van Heylen, joined the monastery of St. Anne's; seldom after quitting the seclusion of the house, except when, by permission, he made a yearly journey to see the widowed Countess of Rerefonde at the convent of our Ladye de Damme, whither that ladye retired when, after a long concealment of the fact, she became apprized of Sir

Alaine's death. At this period, too, Mathieu was wont for many years to pay a few days' visit to his ancient friend Jan, at Sluys. The patriot cloth-worker himself suddenly expired—through over-joy, it was said—in the very minute news was brought of the defeat, before Bruges, of Lewis de Male, by the free Gantois, under the leading of Sir Philip Van Artevelde.

After this event, Mathieu secluded himself wholly within his cell, gaining so great a name for the length of his fasts and the severity of his penances, that he was at length, through these recommendations, backed by the interest of Sir Philip, elected Prior of his house; and, thus dignified, calmly passed his days until, when in the highest odour of sanctity, he was translated to another world, by a stroke of apoplexy, some six-and-twenty years subsequent to the ending of this tale, weighing, as it was whispered, despite his continued mortifications, full six-and-twenty stone!

The ever light-hearted Sir Philip lived for some years a gay but absolutely retired life, contented and most happy with his chosen

bride, mixing neither with war nor politics. An occasion however at last arose, which, unhappily for himself, drew him forth from this wise seclusion, to display to the world the ruder energies which nature had so curiously interwoven with his light, mirth-loving spirit.

Lewis de Male, son of the long banished sovereign who was slain at Crecy, being by the people voluntarily recalled from exile, and, on the acknowledgement and recognition of the charter of their right of self-government, restored to the authority forfeited by his parent, no sooner fancied himself secure, than he likewise sought to subvert their liberties, and once more revert to the ancient despotism.

The nobles he soon gained of course, but what was strange, he also succeeded in corrupting many of the chief leaders of the guilds, which being at length known, created universal dismay amongst the people, who fancied in this defection of their fellows, the cause for ever lost.

At this fearful crisis it was, they remem-

bered the prophetic words of the great Ruward, and at the same time with one voice invoked aloud the name of his son. Philip Van Artevelde heard the prayer of these despairing freemen, and replied to their call with a spirit worthy his mighty sire.

Undauntedly he at once roused them to the fight, and placing himself at their head, defeated Lewis in a pitched battle; wherein, with a mere handful of free men, he advanced against forty thousand helots commanded by the whole chivalry of Flanders and Burgundy. He, upon the heel of this, captured and freed Bruges, and thence drove the tyrant back to exile; in which condition, like his perverse father, he might have lived and died, but for the sympathy of his brother princes, who, trembling before the growth of this stubborn freedom, herded their serfs together, resolute to root it from out the soil where it seemed as resolute to flourish—an evil example to their well governed kingdoms.

In braving this last overwhelming torrent,

Sir Philip worthily died sword in hand, in the midst of his country's invaders on the field of Roosbeke, leaving behind him a name almost as glorious, although not so widely known, as that of Jacob the Ruward.

Hawkwood's after course is so fully laid down by the chroniclers of the time he flourished in, that we might simply refer the reader to them, for a particular account of the exploits and high fortune of the thrice worthy tailor's apprentice, but we owe it to his importance to say here, that after well serving his chosen master as body esquire, which the grateful Sir Leonard, immediately on his being knighted, made him, he was in turn dubbed chevalier on the field of battle, by the hand of the Black Prince, in Guienne, where he covered himself with glory.

He afterwards, as is well recorded, followed Sir Leonard Borgia into Italy, where he is known to have commanded in chief the armies

* He was knighted, and afterwards best known by his second name, John.

of the states, both of Milan and Florence. With the daughter of the prince of the latter state he was finally wedded, and here died, covered with honours.

So deeply was he lamented, and so high was the regard in which his memory was held, that a noble tomb, surmounted by his statue, was shortly after erected by the country, to his perpetual renown, which testimonial of a grateful people to the City apprentice, may yet be seen in the great cathedral church ; it stands close by the monument of his earliest friend, bearing a Latin inscription, of which that excellent historian, John Barnes, gives the following version

“ O HAWKWOOD, ENGLAND’S GLORY, SENT TO BE
THE BULWARK AND THE PRIDE OF ITALY ;
A TOMB, JUST FLORENCE TO THY WORTH DOTH RAISE,
AND JOVIUS REARS A STATUE TO THY PRAISE.”

THE END.

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